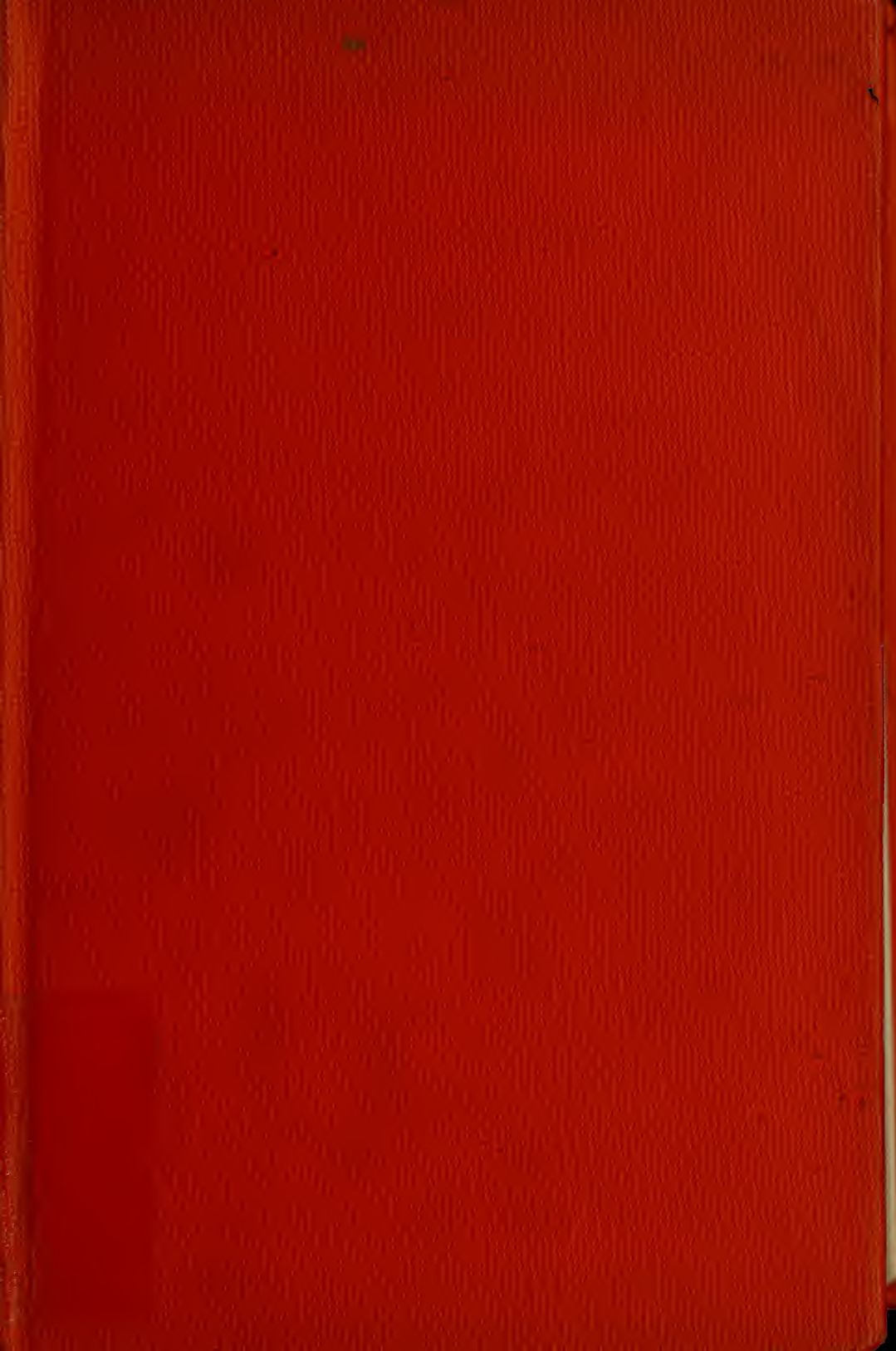




Living wild

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LIVING WILD

or

*Pioneer Children of
Montana*





The Vow

LIVING WILD

or

Pioneer Children of Montana



By

AGNES B. CHOWEN

Illustrated by ERICK BERRY

JC4592



NEW YORK

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NOTE:

The object of this book is to
entertain young people,
and not to record
history.

—THE AUTHOR.

LIVING WILD

or

*Pioneer Children of
Montana*



Chapter 1

PRANKS

WHEN Ted announced that he was going along, Bob and Enith were delighted. Ted was Mother's younger brother and so full of unexpected pranks that she could never keep an eye on him. Bob and Enith were eight and ten, but Uncle Ted was the best kind of a chum with them.

Mother was delighted too, but a trifle anxious. She felt as though she had enough to look out for on that long trip into the West, into unknown Montana. There would be Father, slow and careful and kindly, peering shortsightedly through his glasses, and Bob and Enith and Bertie, who was two years old and full of mischief, and now Ted, which made six in the Bell family.

Ted was sure that life in the new country was going to be one breathless whirl of excitement. When he returned from town under a mountainous package his face was as bright as the red flannel shirt which he shook before Mother's face to make her good-natured. He had other wonderful things for which Bob envied him: a brown leather coat, a pair of leather trousers with fringed buckskin on the seams, gauntlet gloves, a broad-brimmed hat, high-heeled boots, and, lastly, an old hand-organ.

When he brought that in from the hall Mother threw up her hands in amazement. "What on earth did you get that for!" she exclaimed.

"Because it was the cheapest thing in hand-organs I ever saw in my life," he earnestly replied.

"But what shall you do with it?"

"Take it along, of course."

"Oh, Ted! With all the baggage we already have! How could you? And how could you spend your money for such a foolish and ——"

Ted caught her hand, placed it on the organ-crank, and made her grind out "Oh, where, oh, where is my little dog," till her arm ached and she cried, "Stop! Stop! You're pulling my arm out!"

"I won't stop till you promise, cross my heart, not to scold about the organ any more. Will you promise?"

"No."

So he made her turn faster and faster, she being helpless in his strong arms till, presently, the little dog turned into a funeral-march. "B-r-r-r-! No funeral marches before I've killed even a single Sitting Bull!" Ted exclaimed, taking the crank from Mother's hand. And she, in spite of her lame arm, gave him a smart box on the ear.

Mother hoped all the time that something would happen to hinder Ted from taking the organ on the long journey. But when he arrived at the depot where all the family was waiting for the train to

take them to St. Louis, he had the organ on his back.

"All you need is a monkey, to make your outfit complete," Mother angrily told him.

On the train the organ got Ted into trouble the first thing. The conductor would not let it ride in the passenger car. In his strange new clothes, a bandanna around his neck, and hugging an organ, Ted looked like a foreign wandering minstrel, and Mother smiled triumphantly at his difficulty, refusing to assure the conductor that Ted was in any way connected with her party.

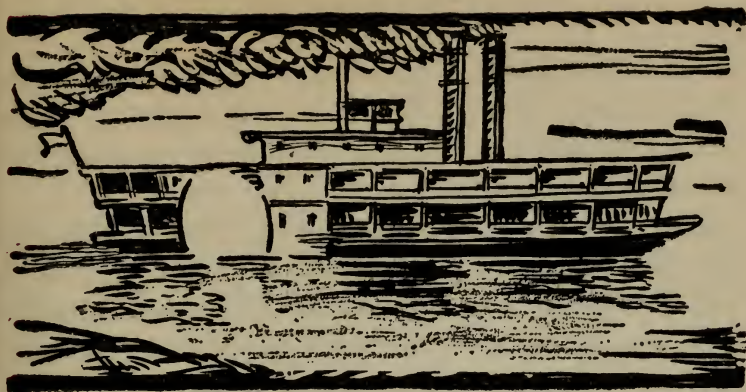
He felt abused and more determined than ever to stick to his property. So he dejectedly followed it into the baggage car, where he sat down and pouted, absently watching the telegraph poles come rushing up to him, nodding jerkily, and again rushing away, followed by groups of trees that tried vainly to keep up. He felt he should feel sorry at leaving his home, perhaps forever, but was too angry with the conductor to be sad. There were a lot of children beside the Bell children in the car with Mother, and he could have had such a good time!

Ted was very impulsive, and headstrong in carrying out sudden plans, and it was that that gave Mother so much anxiety, especially now when they were going right into adventures and dangers that Ted craved. It was well known that the hostile chief, Sitting Bull, was trying to get rid of the white people who wanted to settle in his part of the

country. His recent triumph at Fort Buford was still the talk of the West, and enough to make anyone's scalp tighten at the mere mention of Buford.

For several years Sitting Bull had fought doggedly to drive the soldiers from that fort. He lost heavily in his attacks and felt sure of success when he cut the water supply from the imprisoned soldiers. What was his chagrin then to find that they had dug wells inside the stockade. Already he had lost three hundred of his best warriors. He held a council at which the Indians worked themselves into such a superhuman frenzy that it carried them into the fort, where they killed every single soldier on the premises, and even the wives of some of the officers.

At present, while Sitting Bull was still resting on his big triumph, Mother hoped they might be among the lucky ones to escape his notice. What if Ted should take a notion really to defy the Indian, as he often threatened? His threats were made in jest, but she was uneasy at the gleam in his eye when he made them. She still looked upon him as a puppy that rushes blindly upon its first porcupine.



Chapter 2

ON BOARD

THE steamboat *Peninah*, very smart in a new coat of paint, was moving energetically up the stream, dodging overhanging willow-branches heavy with waxy cotton pods and heading straight for the big wild country, the home of the free Missouri River that reaches into the very heart of the Rockies.

The near bank was pink for miles and miles with wild roses that sent their perfume over the deck. Here the children sat grouped around Mr. Teasdale, the Old Timer, with his marvelous stories. Sometimes Mother wondered whether she ought to let Bob and Enith listen so much to the wild-west tales, but she was bewildered in an atmosphere of Indians, outlaws, and criminals. She really kept expecting worse things all the time, and was grateful that they did not happen.

Teasdale had for years been a prospector in the West, and was now on his way back from St. Louis where he had gone to have a bag of ore from his secret mine assayed.

Every day was a happy holiday for the children. There were almost a hundred passengers on board, and a crew of thirty-six men. For many days the food was fine, but as the markets were left behind, the fare sifted down to coffee, dried fruits, corn, salt-pork, and hominy-fritters. Fish was rarely served, though the river offered many kinds. Fresh meat was not popular with the children because it often tasted gamey.

There were three other children beside the Bell children on the boat, and this made enough to play many kinds of games. Uncle Mark, too, came on board at Sioux City, to go West and get well. He was not jolly like Uncle Ted, but sickly and cross and fussily neat. The doctors said that the mountain air might cure Uncle Mark. Almost every night it rained, making him cough and call everything *pernicious*.

Day after day Bob and Enith would lean on the deck-rail and watch the bright ribbon of color against a background of willows or pines and firs. They could hardly believe that it consisted of millions of wild roses! They had never seen a single wild rose in bloom, and here were bushels of them going to waste! The shore was a beautiful, mysterious fairyland; it even held the hidden ogre, for

there were hostile Indians lurking in the brush and in the forests behind the roses, ready to pounce upon the boat at the first favorable opportunity.

"I don't see why Indians want to attack the boats," said Bob one day as he and Enith stood on deck beside the Captain, who was viewing the distance through field-glasses. "The trains carry more people than the boats do."

"Yes, but there ain't a single railroad in all the big northwest where we're going," the Captain answered, handing the glasses to Bob and asking if he could see tepees about three miles away. "And they hate the boats because they're harder to catch than the prairie-schooners."

"Why can't they be friendly with the white people?" Enith asked.

"A few are. But most of them try to keep white people away because they take their land and game. You know the buffalo gives the Indians their food, clothes, tepees, and ever so many other things which they make from the different parts of the animal. But, here we are at the wood-station! You don't see any Indians coming this way, do you Bob?"

"No, sir," Bob answered, handing back the glasses. "There are no Indians, and it is so light yet that I wish you'd let Enith and me go on shore for just a little while, to pick flowers."

The Captain shook his head. "Too dangerous," he replied, and went below.

Bob, Enith, Willie and Elsie Martin leaned on

the rail and watched the men going forth and back over the plank carrying great loads of well-seasoned cotton-wood which was all chopped and stacked, ready to carry on board as fast as possible.

But when the next wood-station was reached there was no wood-pile ready to be carried on board, nor were any of the choppers to be seen. The place was deserted, having a mysterious and forlorn look, and the cabin-door, slowly swinging back and forth, wailed dismally in three notes.

After a short investigation the Captain shrugged his shoulders, saying, "The Indians got them. All hands on shore and chop wood!"

While the men were getting their axes and saws, the Captain sent three scouts in different directions to reconnoitre, and placed five sentinels around the enclosure where the men worked. As the delay promised to be long, Bob and Willie begged so hard to be allowed to go ashore, just for a little while, that finally Father, Uncle Ted, and Willie's father took the two boys and Enith and Elsie across the plank to gather roses and wild clematis.

"Don't go beyond the sentinels!" the Captain called to them, and they answered "All right!"

Bob and Willie were tingling with the promise of adventure, and explored every corner within the circle, going just as close to the edge of the forbidden ground as they dared. Enith and Elsie were satisfied to pick roses and other flowers which they

carried back to their mothers to make wreaths and garlands.

Pretty soon the pilot came along. The children were a little afraid of the pilot because he was one of those men who carry a sneer in the corner of their noses all the time. He started by scaring them when he told Father to have his hair cut before the Indians got a chance at it. He always contradicted the Captain and made bad remarks behind his back. If not allowed to have his own way he sometimes ran the boat close to snags and sand-bars on purpose.

Pilots were very important in those days, and got big pay. Today the pilot seemed in an amiable mood.

"How'd you like to pick some wild grapes?" he asked Enith and Elsie. They would have liked nothing better, but reminded him that they were not allowed to go beyond the sentinels.

He laughed. "Ain't I as good as any sentinel any day?" he asked, and as Father and Mr. Martin joined them just then, it was agreed to go for grapes without letting anybody else know.

Before very long Jarl, the pilot, led them to vines heavily laden, but, alas, the grapes were still green and sour. It was too early in the season.

"Well, there are fine service-berries right across this flat," said Jarl, "and they sure are ripe by this time."

"What are service-berries?" Enith wanted to

know, and that decided the question of going farther. Jarl led them across the flat and again into a thicket, making Father and Mr. Martin nervous. When they came upon bushes bending to the earth with luscious ripe fruit, they ate and ate, and picked into their hats, forgetful of everything else. Suddenly they were startled by a peremptory whistle from the boat.

Bob and Enith began to run, but the pilot stopped them, saying they would have a heat-stroke. It was a scorching day.

"Take it easy, like me," he said, walking slowly. "Do you think that boat kin move without me? It's Nigger Jim, that blamed half-wit, who's tootin' to play a trick on us. If it is, I'll beat him soft, that's all."

He had hardly spoken when the whistle blew a second time, more urgently than before, and then he, too, ran.

Everybody else was already on board, and the men were ready to pull in the second plank. Two scouts had returned and breathlessly reported about three hundred Indians crawling in the brush towards the boat, and many others on horses in the distance.

As soon as the berry-pickers were on board an Indian popped out of the brush and leaped upon the moving plank, waving a green-branch.

"Shoot him! Tip him into the water! He's tryin' to fool us with his peace-emblem!" came from

all sides, but the Captain lifted his hand and bade the men replace the plank while he motioned the Indian forward, saying, "We may learn something from him."

The Indian came on board, but first he reached into the brush and brought forth a pretty young Indian woman. Both ran on deck and the boat shot into the channel.

The Indian was a proud, fine-looking young man, and as soon as he was rested he gave the Captain his story. He belonged to a northern tribe, and his medicine had told him that he must travel many miles and steal his bride from an enemy-tribe. This he had done. For two days he and the girl had been fleeing on one horse, until it fell and broke a leg. Their pursuers were gaining on them so rapidly that they were about to surrender when they spied the smoke of the boat, coming up-stream, and they fought their way through brush and charred down-timber, hoping to reach the river bank in time to signal the boat. The girl was the daughter of a haughty chief, and she stood proudly watching her future husband's face while he explained in the sign language.

Bob and Enith were greatly interested in these, the first live Indians they ever had seen near enough to be talked to, and they followed the man's words and gestures as carefully as though they understood them.

Before the Indian could finish his story loud war-

whoops came from the shore, and a band of Indians, dressed chiefly in war-paint, dashed to the water's edge. With shouts and motions they demanded the run-away couple. Some plunged their horses into the stream and tried to swim to the boat, but the channel was very deep, and the horses were tired from the two-days' chase. The noise and manoeuvres on shore increased till it seemed as though the boat would be attacked. The Captain called the passengers together and asked if they were willing to take the chances of an attack, or whether they preferred to have him give the young people up to their pursuers.

Everybody stood by the runaways; the boat increased its speed till it was well beyond the reach of arrows for the present.

The Indian girl had left home without any warning, so she had on barely enough clothes to keep her warm after sundown. Mother, seeing the girl shiver, went through her own wardrobe and gave whatever she could spare—especially brightly colored things, such as a red flannel petticoat, a velvet jacket, a blue silk neckerchief, and a pair of red woolen stockings, the first the girl ever had seen. She did not like them very well, but she was delighted with the petticoat which she immediately tore to pieces and made a long, shirtlike garment. This, with the blue kerchief around her neck, and her cheeks deeply flushed, made her look very pretty. She was extremely shy and reserved, and seemed ashamed to show interest in anything.

When night came, the Captain did not know what to do with the elopers, as he had no vacant room; and the women, especially Mrs. Martin, would not think of having thieving Indians loose on deck. They could have been lodged among the freight below, but there were only rough men there, some drunk all the time, and the Captain was afraid they would make trouble.

It looked as though they should have to sit up all night, maybe several nights, in whatever corner they could find, when Mother again came to the rescue. She offered to take Bertie into her own room and let the Indian girl share Enith's stateroom.

This pleased the Indians very much, but Enith was scared. The girl could not speak to her, and behind those deep silent eyes all kinds of murderous thoughts might be forming. Mother coaxed, and finally promised to come into the room every little while during the night if they would leave the door unlocked. So Enith yielded. She took such a long time to undress, and was so shy, that the Indian girl looked out of the window most of the time, Enith's room being on the shore side. When their eyes met, both smiled, and Enith got into bed as quickly as she could, drawing the clothes close to her chin, lying flat on her back determined not to go to sleep at all.

The Indian girl never took anything off at all, but lay on top of the bed in her red flannel gown.



Chapter 3

INDIANS!

IT WAS a chilly, unfriendly afternoon, keeping everybody indoors. With the darkness came rain and absolute quiet on the upper deck. The young Indian and his bride were to go ashore as soon as it was safe to stop the boat.

Bob and Enith knew about it, and they wanted to see them go. So they dodged Mother and huddled together in a protected corner, listening to the mournful rain drawing its wet breath hissing through the tree branches, making them talk in whispers and look over their shoulders at every new sound. Soon they were shivering with the cold, and their noses were very red, but they were determined to see the Indians land, and before very long the boat slowly swung toward the shore. All the lights were put out, and then the Indians came out of the cabin. Bob heard the young man tell the Captain that by cutting across the country at a certain point

he could reach a friendly tribe which would help them on their flight.

Bob understood everything because the Captain repeated much of the Indian's speech by asking questions.

When the Captain understood their plans, he gave them food for three days and a heavy blanket. Then he accompanied them to the plank which the men noiselessly put into place. He wished them good luck and shook hands with both. They seemed very cheerful, though as soon as they set foot on the shore the rain turned into a torrent, making the trees laugh and whisper knowingly. But the Indians went firmly forward, Bob and Enith watched them out of sight and wondered if it really was all fun to be an Indian and live wild. Right then they were glad to know that warm and dry beds were waiting for them. Bob began to sneeze, and then held his breath to listen, for, far down the stream a muffled but penetrating cry came from the dark woods, dying out in a long wail, like that of a human being in distress.

Bob had heard that wild-cats and mountain-lions often cried like that to fool their victims, and he and Enith looked at each other with prickling noses; before they could speak, the cry was repeated, but this time from up the stream, like a faint echo.

They ran towards their state-rooms, and meeting one of the deck-hands asked if he thought those cries were made by bob-cats.

"Bob cats!" he laughed. "Them's Indians! Indians kin use the call of wild animals better'n the animals kin theirselves, and they signal to each other like that. We got to git out o' here lickity-split, and I for one ain't envyin' them two young Indians."

He hastened on, and though it was time to tie up for the night, and dangerously dark, too, the boat quickly crossed the river and felt its way westward.

Bob and Enith were hardly in bed before they heard the Captain giving hasty orders, and they sat up listening to the tramping of feet and other sounds of confusion. In a few minutes they were ordered to get up and dress, and fly to the arrow-proof room, which they did without arguing, Father leading the way.

All the other children, and Mother and the women, were already there, while the men were carrying, hauling and pushing the goods boxes, trunks, furniture, bedding, and all such stuff to the danger side of the decks for fortification. Small openings were left here and there for gun-holes.

The pilot said it was all nonsense, as Indians rarely fought at night, but pretty soon a shower of arrows struck the barricade with a whining whizz. The Indians did their shooting carefully. They had no guns, and did not want to waste their arrows—hewn out of obsidian and flint—where they would bring no returns, and could not be picked

up afterwards. But they kept up the noise and dancing, now and then sending a fire-arrow.

The Captain could easily have ended the trouble by letting the Indians know that the young couple was no longer on board, but it could not yet have reached safety, and he would not betray it into the enemy's hands.

He gave strict orders to his men to do no unnecessary killing. The feeling between Indian and white man was growing worse all the time, and the Indian runners could carry news from tribe to tribe much faster than the boat could travel. It would have been extremely unpleasant to fight his way clear to Benton.

Presently all hostilities on shore stopped abruptly. It was either a ruse to put the Captain off his guard, or the Indians had caught the runaway couple. Be that as it may, there was no more fighting. Uncle Ted and Bob were terribly disappointed to have things die down just when the fight looked most promising. They hoped for better luck next time. One man, only, was wounded. An arrow scooped away a portion of the pilot's chin, and fortunately, it was not a poisoned arrow.

The next day as the boat swung around a bend in the river it surprised a band of about twenty wild horses at play in the shallow water near the shore. Bob saw them first and called the others, and all came and leaned on the rail to watch the pretty

creatures as they stood with heads and ears erect, like sculptured horses, staring at the boat.

The pilot could not resist giving a toot with the whistle, and the horses quivered and bounded to higher ground where they wheeled about in almost military order and again stared at the strange thing on the river. They were small, but round and sleek, with long manes and tails. When the pilot could not resist tooting just once more they broke line and dashed away with wild free antics, kicking up their heels.

Bob and Enith now thought there was some fun, anyway, in being free and wild—when the sun was shining. They watched the horses out of sight and then saw something else moving in the distance, close to the river, sometimes looking like a man, and then again like a wind-tossed umbrella. They called the Captain's attention to it and he got his glasses.

It was a man. All alone he was trudging up the stream, miles and miles from other human beings, almost starved, and worn out with weariness. When he looked like an umbrella, he was swinging his coat to attract the attention of the people on the boat. As soon as the Captain gave him a return signal he dropped where he was and waited.

The boat-hands had to help him on board, he was so weak, and he had to rest a long time before he could eat. After his first bite of food he told the Captain that he was one of the choppers belonging to the station where no wood was ready. About

ten days ago, he said, on returning to his cabin after hunting meat, he heard his companion quarreling with Indians who had been hanging around the place for some time and were getting way with almost everything on the premises—food, axes, saws, clothing, and so on. At first, when there were nine white men at the station the Indians were not so bold, but since seven of the men went farther up the stream to open a new wood-yard, the Indians constantly grew more insolent.

He heard his partner scolding them, pretending he could call a lot of soldiers on short notice, and they laughed at him. At the first sign of danger he climbed into a tree with his gun, to pick the Indians off more easily, and when he reached a safe branch and looked down, his partner was already bound to a tree and had six arrows sticking in his breast. The Indians were dancing around him, taunting him. Three were making away with all the food, and two were on the lookout for him.

He stayed up in the tree all night, and when the Indians were tired of waiting for him they went away. But he knew that they would be watching, so he stayed up there through the day, also, and when it was again dark, came cautiously down and fled up the stream. During the day he remained in hiding, and at night he traveled. Squirrels eaten raw, and berries, had been his only food. He dared not make a fire or shoot.

The next day the stranger came up on deck, and

when he saw Teasdale, the old-timer, his ears went way back, and the hair on the back of Teasdale's neck bristled. They had met before, several years ago when Teasdale was a cranky hermit living alone in the mountains and guarding his gold-mine. One day when he was out for meat he saw, to his unspeakable indignation, a band of tame sheep on the flat in the distance. He grabbed his gun and galloped to the herder, who was none other than this stranger.

"What do you mean, you prairie pole-cat, bringin' sheep only twenty miles from my claim!" he hotly demanded. "What do you mean!"

The herder deliberately spat out his tobacco wad and answered, "I reckon I mean to stay, now that I have found such a polite neighbor. I was only passin' through the country, but now I'll make a camp right here, and my sheep kin roam wherever they danged please." And he staid, the two annoyin' each other whenever they could.

So here they were, staring at each other, Teasdale stroking his long beard, and Dave spitting into the river. They did not fly at each other's throats, but soon pretended to ignore each other. Everybody on the boat gathered around the new arrival, eager to hear him tell of his adventures and escapes. His stories were so thrilling that some of the passengers began to wonder if he was truthful, hinting that he himself might have killed his wood-yard partner in a quarrel and buried him. They did not

realize that the sneer on Teasdale's face made the stories ten times more exciting than they should have been. The man, though a really good and interesting talker, looked very ill. He was heading for the trading-post when he was picked up, he said.

Hearing the trading-post much talked of, Bob and Enith expected to see a place something like Chicago. What was their surprise then when the boat drew up to a landing near a small group of squat log buildings surrounded by a stockade. No streets, no stores, no lights, and not even a church-steeple. And the stranger did not get off the boat, either. Everybody called him the Adventurer.

A few days after the boat picked up the Adventurer it ran into a herd of buffaloes that had just begun to cross the river. The Captain was disgusted and impatient at the delay, but ordered the pilot to wait rather than take chances of an accident. But the pilot pretended to misunderstand and speeded up the machinery which brought on a collision with the foremost animals. The meeting of boat and beast was like a small earthquake shock. Two buffaloes became entangled in the wheel and completely smashed it.

Without waste of words the Captain took the pilot on shore and gave him the soundest thrashing he had had in his life. It took much longer to repair the wheel than it would have taken to wait for a herd twice as big as the present one, to cross in front of the boat.

The accident did not seem to bother the rest of the animals who continued their leisurely swimming, a few pausing on the bank and interestedly watching the strange performance between the Captain and pilot. But the passengers could not see it.

"Only about three thousand," said the Adventurer who was leaning on the rail with the children and counting the animals. And then he told a buffalo story.

For several days the boat moved too slowly to suit Bob, and while prowling around he heard the Captain telling the Old Timer that he was waiting for the *Flirt*, a steamer that was coming up from St. Louis with a lot of soldiers. "I'd rather have an escort than pass Fort Buford alone," he said.

The words gave Bob a thrill, as did everything else that meant danger, especially secret danger. The soldiers were going to Fort Shaw, one of the newer frontier posts, named in honor of Colonel Robert G. Shaw, of the 54th Massachusetts.

General Gibbon was in command of Fort Shaw at that time.

The *Peninah* gave a long, slow, lurch, and came to a complete standstill. It was aground on a sand-bar.

The Missouri River was much harder to navigate than the Mississippi and other big streams because of its many snags, sand-bars, and tortuous windings. Old time rivermen always said that the longer they knew the river, the less they knew about it,

and they could never be sure of what it would do next. It was a kind of outlaw river, shifting, blocking its channel, eating away large portions of land in one place and carrying them to some other place. The captains as well as the pilots had to watch it all the time, and even then it played tricks on them by entangling them in whirlpools.

All the able-bodied men had to help loosen the *Peninah* from the bar, and again Bob and Willie begged to go ashore, but the Captain said no. He was cross because he had to take a lot of the freight off the boat to the land while the men lifted it over the bar by sparring. Then the freight was brought back. It took a long time, but it gave the *Flirt* time to come nearer.

Chapter 4

SITTING BULL

THE character of the country had changed entirely. Long stretches of it were called the Bad Lands because nothing could live there, not even grass. It was like a giant's beach on which the giant's children had built forts, tunnels, pyramids, mushrooms, leaning towers at the point of toppling over, castles, churches—all on the same massive scale. Their coloring was pink, white, gray, yellow, and bright rust-color. Deep cuts among the formations ran in all directions. These formations were the work of volcanic eruptions.

Bob was leaning on the rail gazing at the scene when the Adventurer stopped beside him.

"How'd you like to git lost in such a place?" he asked. "These very Bad Lands once was the cause of my bein' a captive of the Indians for a long time," he continued. "It was at the beginnin' of the Montana gold rush. My pal and me was as crazy to git there as anyone else, and we stopped herdin' sheep and prospected everywhere. One day when we was bein' chased by Indians we struck these Bad Lands. Gosh, I hate to think of it now! As soon as we ran into one of the cuts we was safe from our pursuers, but we didn't know it, 'cause we'd

never heard of the Bad Lands and didn't know that Indians never went there if they could help it. So we wondered what 'was the matter with 'em, why they stopped so suddenly. We wandered about tryin' to find a way out. There wasn't any. For five days we kept goin'; nothin' to eat, no blankets, no water. That was the worst of it, no water. On the sixth day my pal got light in the head and began to see wonderful things to eat and drink. He said the devil had a string on every bit of food and jerked it away every time he reached for it.

"Then he begged me to take him to the Indians because they'd give him water and food, even if they did kill him afterwards. But I couldn't find the way out no better'n he could. The next day he died. I wanted to. But I started up again not darin' to rest 'cause I couldn't git back on my feet again once I laid down. That light-headed business came to me, too, and when I threw back my head to balance my brains, I saw high over me, on a projection of earth an Indian on a pony, lookin' as though he was painted on the sky. I thought that I was givin' away my scalp, but I was that glad to see a livin' human that I threw my hat in the air and shouted with my last gasp of breath.

"Then I fell on my face, and when I came back to my senses, I was in an Indian camp, and they was all treatin' me with a strange kind of politeness. You see, I was the first white man who had ever come out of those Bad Lands alive, and they

thought I must be close to the Great Spirit. When they found me I was close to the mouth of the labyrinth, but I didn't know it. They made me a chief, but I didn't care for their kind of livin', and at the first chance I ran away."

Because this story seemed true as he told it, and greatly interested both the grown-ups and children, Teasdale grew angry. And soon the Adventurer's gloating face fired him to tell his own Indian story which was a series of swift and breathless escapes ending like this:

"During that three-days' chase by the Sioux I killed seven of them, ran for more than a hundred and fifty miles, slept in a snake's den, remained under water half an hour, plunged into a hollow burnt log as a white man and came out of the other end a nigger, only to find myself up against a high rock wall without a single crack to crawl into, without a foothold of any kind, without a single bush to hide behind; and in front of me a solid row of Indians pointing their arrows straight at my heart!"

He paused for effect till someone awesomely breathed, "How did you escape?" and Teasdale answered, "I didn't. They killed me and scalped me."

He gave the Adventurer a look of triumph and quickly walked away leaving the others staring, perplexed, till Father burst out laughing, and they saw. "I guess that puts him at the head of storytellers," said Father, "Unless you," addressing the Adventurer, "want to try to do better than that."

The Adventurer smiled and shook his head. Plainly he was very ill. A few day later, when the children missed him and asked for him, Jim told them that he had died of the small-pox, and been buried secretly, at night.

Ted was daily growing more impatient to get right into the adventures about which he was hearing all the time, and he made up his mind to become one of the hunters for the boat, if he could. The hunters walked on land whenever they wanted to, and had all kinds of experiences, making the boat stop for them to get off and on.

When he asked the chief hunter's permission to accompany him, the man refused to be bothered with a tenderfoot, especially in a part of the country where he might at any moment have to run and hide from Indians. Then Ted approached the Captain, and was so humble and wheedling that the latter thought he might as well let him try, being sure that Ted would soon cure himself of all such desires. So he told the chief hunter to take Ted along the next time he went on land.

When the time came the happy Ted dressed himself in his fine Western clothes, armed himself to his eyebrows, and sneaked on shore with the man when Mother was not looking.

The excitement began right away. The hunter pointed out two antelopes to Ted, telling him to follow them and get them if he could. He himself went in an opposite direction after having given

Ted very plain instructions as to how far to go. And Ted stalked those innocent creatures with such excitement that he was harmless so far as shooting was concerned. Presently he thought he'd better pause and get his bearings, as he had been walking quite a while, and he was surprised that on looking back he could see neither boat nor hunter. The antelopes slipped away in a coulee when his back was to them.

Ted was unwilling to return to the boat empty-handed, so he shot at the only living thing in sight, which happened to be a skunk, the very first he ever had seen. He thought it would make a beautiful neck-fur for Mother, so he ran at it, eagerly, and it squirted its horrid oil all over the front of his clothes, nearly suffocating him. He shouted for the hunter, and sat down on the river-bank feeling pretty sick.

When the boat came along, the Captain would not let Ted come on board. He told him to go into the brush and take off his clothes, and leave them there. Then he sent Father to him with a clean change, even to the underwear. Ted said a hasty good-bye to his beautiful Western finery, and no longer wished to go hunting.

In spite of feeling ill, he noticed that the boat was enveloped in an air of mystery. The men were hastening unsmiling to and fro, speaking in short sentences, cleaning their weapons, and building defense barricades on the upper deck. All the passengers looked anxious, for the horror-spot of the entire trip was becoming faintly visible in the distance.

No one mentioned danger, but the alert Bob and Willie, filtering through baggage and barricades, learned that the scout had reported something very important. When the steamer finally swung around the last bend between it and the fort, the nervous watchers saw a picture which made their breath stop coming or going. It was the tepees of six thousand Sioux Indians with Sitting Bull at their head.

Sitting Bull had come on purpose to meet this boat which he knew was carrying traders' supplies. He really belonged in Dakota, but liked better to trade at the Montana posts.

So, while the greenhorns on board were fearful and praying, the boat glided to the landing in a businesslike way, without signs of haste or fear. But the guards were alert and wide awake, and all the guns were ready for instant use. While the business of trading was going on, hundreds of Indians came on to the boat, prying into everything, handling everything, bold and assured.

Bob and Enith had eyes only for Sitting Bull. He did not come on board. He suspected traps everywhere. When his warriors were fighting, he was never found among them, but in some well protected retreat making "medicine" for them to win. Fighting was out of keeping with holiness, he often declared, and he was a priest, a medicine-man, a prophet, not a warrior. His medicine did not always work but his followers never blamed him for

that, though they gave him all the glory when they won.

Now he stood on the bank, close to the river, surrounded by his bodyguard. Enith thought he looked very much like the old Italian woman in Chicago from whom she used to buy monkey-bread. He had a strong, dark face, with drooping mouth corners and a frowning forehead. His hair was parted in the middle and hung forward on his shoulders in two braids that were wrapped in bits of brightly colored cloth. He was thick-set, and not very tall.

He knew that everybody's eyes were on him, and he straightened up, throwing back his shoulders to look more dignified, keeping his face unsmiling.

"Isn't he bound at all, by treaty?" Mother asked Uncle Mark.

"Not he! He declares that the Almighty made him a free Indian and that he will remain a free Indian. His people made him their chief because he hates the white people, and he lives up to that reputation. Notice how those half-veiled eyes are taking in every detail of our boat's defenses, of the number of people, the value of the cargo, and so forth. He no doubt holds our fate in the slightest motion of that calm brown hand, and if he doesn't strike now, it probably is because he can see the thin column of smoke far down the river, and knows there's another boat approaching. He has to size that up first."

"With all his men he could easily take both the boats."

"Yes, but since his experience at this fort that time, he is careful. If there is one thing he's afraid of, its cannons."

The sight of the *Flirt* brought rejoicing to the *Peninah's* people but it made the Indians more daring, and they stirred restlessly as though looking for something mean to do before the *Flirt* arrived. The Captain told all the passengers to lock their rooms. He had all movable small things fastened, keeping his eyes and thoughts on everything, hoping to find diversion for the Indians a little longer. Then Ted hove in sight, giving him an idea.

"Ted," he said, "you've often given us a lot of fun with your organ, try it on the Indians now, will you? I have to keep them occupied till the *Flirt* overtakes us."

Ted was delighted to have the organ made so important, so he got it from his room and proudly carried it past Mother.

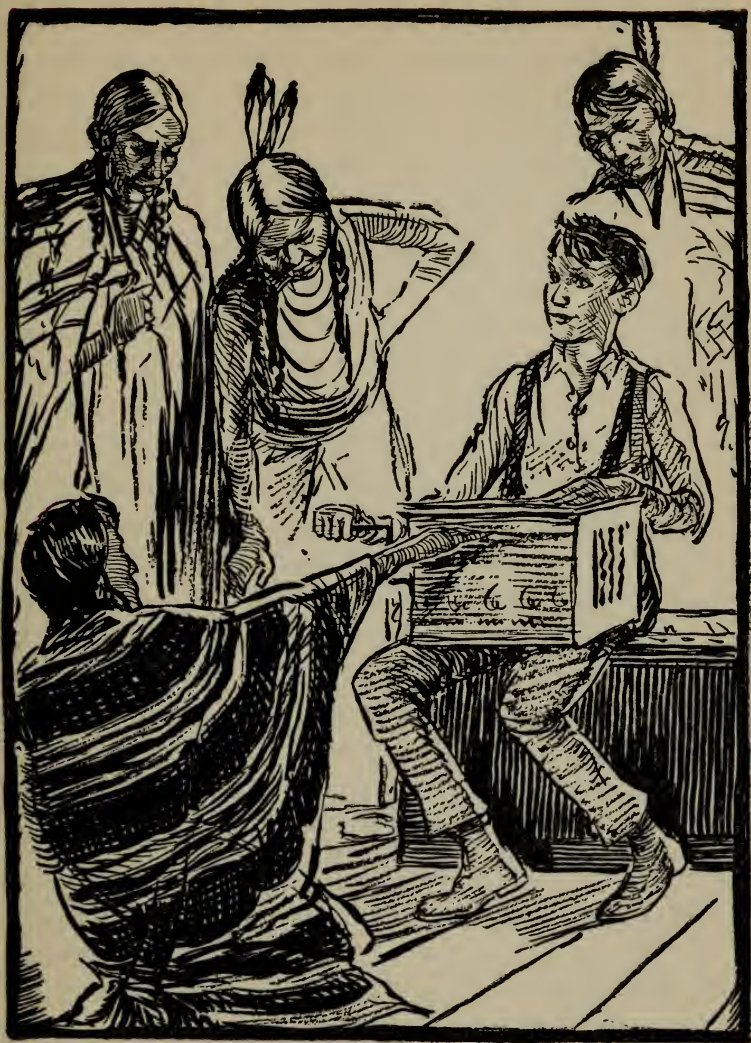
"What on earth are you up to now?" she asked. But he held his head the higher and went on without answering.

The Indians became interested at once. They were puzzled and a little mistrustful, never before had they seen such a strange thing, and they had not yet heard its voice. Ted fussed over it without paying attention to them, dusting, polishing, adjusting. They watched him closely, whispering to each other.

Presently Ted motioned them forward and only two were brave enough to come nearer. They circled around the organ, gradually lessening the distance between it and themselves till a laughing young squaw deliberately stepped up to it and felt its polished surface and then looked at herself in it. That gave the others courage, and they, too, went to it and timidly touched it, talking excitedly and making signs. When they were where Ted wanted them he suddenly turned the crank and let out a burst of music that sent the Indians across the deck as though shot from a cannon.

At first they were angry, but as Ted kept on playing and laughing, their curiosity overcame their anger and they came forward again, led by the laughing squaw. Ted put her hand on the crank and she played delightedly while the others chattered and laughed the more. All wanted a chance to play now, and the Captain whispered to Ted not to leave the instrument out of his sight while the boat was at Buford.

One of the white visitors to the boat was a saloon-keeper named McHale. He eagerly offered Ted five hundred dollars for the organ, but Ted would not listen to any offers. The Indians were puzzled before, and when Ted lifted the cover and showed them the machinery grinding out the tunes their amazement was boundless. An Indian buck asked Ted to let him take it and show it to Sitting Bull, and Ted said that he would take it himself.



Ted brought out his hand organ —



So they all followed him, like children after the Pied Piper, and Ted, carrying the organ straight up to the haughty chief, made a bow, then played a funeral march.

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Mother nearly fainted. She was sure that Sitting Bull would see a challenge in that, as she herself did. But he only smiled, making some remark to the Indian nearest him who, in motions, told Ted that the chief wanted to see it closer. Ted lifted it, but the guard would not let him approach the sacred person. So Ted swung it on to his back and returned to the boat with it. Sitting Bull frowned.

Another group of Indians came to the boat displaying their buffalo-robcs, bead-embroidered pouches and moccasins, wooden beads, chains of polished shells, and other trinkets. The thing that Uncle Ted admired above everything else was an antelope's head, hollowed out to be worn as a hat. It could be drawn down so the wearer could see through the eye-holes. The Indian explained that it was a decoy. When hunting antelopes or other game he would put the hat on and lie down in the deep grass, his head, only, showing. The unsuspecting victims would come near enough to be speared or shot easily.

He offered to trade it for Ted's organ, but Ted laughed at the offer. He showed other things which he was willing to swap for it and the Indian finally took the red flannel shirt. Red was the favorite color with all the Indians.

Ted put the decoy on his head right away and got down on his hands and feet, skipping about like a stiff-legged calf, kicking up his heels and trying to hook everybody with those little horns. Mother was sitting out on the deck now with the sleeping Bertie in her lap, and when Ted pranced up to her, rubbing against her knees like a cat, the Indians nearly died laughing. But Bertie, awakened by the noise and seeing the strange animal in front of him, screamed. So Ted had to take it off quickly.

Chapter 5

THE MYSTERIOUS HOOD

THE *Flirt* came up along side the *Peninah* when it was getting dark, giving the Captain courage to tell the Indians to go home. They went, and one of the chiefs approached Father and gave him to understand that if he would trade Enith for ponies, he would give him thirty for her.

Everybody laughed, but Enith ran to her room frightened to death. Her cousin, Annette, to whose home they were going, had actually been stolen from the boat by the Indians when her family went up the Missouri to join Uncle Robert.

So Enith did not come out of her room till the boat had swung away from the landing and was far out in the stream.

Uncle Mark had had himself transferred to the boat with the soldiers, because it was faster than the *Peninah*. "I want to reach Robert's place before winter," he teasingly said to Mother. "I'll tell the folks that you are on the way."

Ted longed to go also, being restless with the delays, but he did not have the extra money, and the Captain told him he and his organ should be greatly needed all through the Sioux country. Mother apologized for her unwillingness to take the

organ along, for no doubt it had saved their lives, and might do so again often.

"Bring it on deck so we can decorate it with flowers, Ted," she said, gathering all the wild flowers that had been brought aboard, and then, to everybody's sorrow and anger, the organ could not be found. It had been stolen at Buford, though it was hard to imagine such a thing when Ted was guarding it all the time except those few minutes when he was an antelope.

When all was again tranquil and in order, Jim, the half-wit, stumbled to the upper deck carrying a tin pail with a tight cover. Jim was called half-wit because something about his mind was missing, though that did not hurt anybody. He rarely spoke, but went about his work singing in whispers from morning till night. He was always in a hurry, let his tongue hang out when working hard, stumbled over everything and nothing, never got excited or angry—except in rare cases. He was half-Negro and half-Indian, big, and stronger than he knew. He used to say proudly, that by "profession" he was a butcher.

So now he sat in a corner singing lustily and hardly making a sound. He kept sending wistful glances to the children who were playing house across from him and paying no attention to his actions. Soon he called, "Want to see what a nice live pet I've brought for you?"

They ran to him eagerly asking "Coyote?" "Rab-

bit?" "prairie-dog?" to all of which he shook his head, grinning and singing harder than ever while loosening the cover of the pail. At last he lifted it slowly and they pushed in front of each other to look. After one glance Enith and Elsie fell back with cries of horror, for coiled in the pail lay a large live rattle-snake.

The girls ran away growing white in the face, but Bob and Willie keenly watched the weaving coils and darting tongue.

"Let's see its rattles," Bob urged, and Jim began to stir the coils with a stick when the Captain appeared, called by the cries of the girls.

My, wasn't he angry!

"You fool!" he exclaimed, "don't you know better than to bring such a dangerous thing among the children? What if it got away and crawled among the baggage and freight!" He put the cover on the pail and flung the whole thing overboard declaring, "That's what I'll do with you, too, if you ever try such a trick again!"

Jim looked sorrowfully after the pail bobbing on the ripples. "He wouldn't a hurt anybody," he said, as the Captain left him, "no more'n he'd a hurt me. I always play with 'em on land. I learned how from Bill Fairweather."

"But they are very dangerous, aren't they?" Willie asked.

"I reckon so—to most people, 'cause most people are afraid of 'em. Bill Fairweather, up at the

gold-diggin's, could pick a rattler up in his bare hands any time; and he'd carry 'em around for days in his coat-pocket or his shirt. Sometimes he'd tease 'em on purpose to make 'em mad, but they never offered to bite him. He never in his life killed a snake."

Bob wrote the name down, and later asked several people about Bill Fairweather and, strangely, they all told him the same thing Jim had.

The snake in its bobbing canoe was not yet out of sight when the boat drew to the shore to take on a single passenger—a white woman. You could not see where she had come from, and she refused to come to the upper deck, remaining almost hidden among the freight boxes, and, in spite of the great heat, wearing a hood all the time.

She sat watching the shore, speaking to no one and not caring to be spoken to.

"Why doesn't she take off her hood sometimes?" Bob asked, and the cook answered, with a laugh,

"I guess she'd scare you if she did," and then of course Bob had to know why. "She hasn't got any hair," the cook explained. "She was scalped by Indians a few years ago and was left for dead. But she recovered because they took such good care of her at the tradin'-post. She even sleeps with that hood on."

The important head-piece was made from an old gray flannel shirt, and had a ruffle around the edge.

"I should think the heat would kill her."

"Yes, but the hood is a protection against killin', too. All the Indians up and down the river know it by this time, and because she went through the scalpin' without dyin', their superstition makes 'em afraid to get very close to her."

"Why do they scalp people, anyway? Can't they be satisfied with just killing them?"

"Scalpin' is part of their religion. They believe that scalped persons can't go to heaven, which they call the happy huntin' grounds, and they scalp as many enemies as possible on earth so they won't have to meet 'em and fight 'em again in heaven. That's why they take such risks when carryin' dead friends from the battle-field. They want to get 'em before the enemy scalps 'em. And they want to meet 'em in heaven."

"I read once that they won't scalp certain persons, Indian or white. Why is that, do you think?"

"It's part of the same religion. When they kill a big chief or white officer and don't scalp 'em it's because they'd rather have 'em for slaves in the other world where the slaves have to wait on 'em and do all their dirty work. Some Indians won't fight in the dark because they believe that anyone killed in the dark has to wander through all eternity in the dark."

The hooded woman was now the chief attraction, for the story had leaked out. Everybody tried to get a glimpse of her head when the hood slipped the least bit aside, or when the wind moved it. The

visitors to the lower deck, though not actually rude, became a nuisance because of the little space, and had to be sent back. The woman paid no attention to anyone, but sat watching the shore.

Before long the boat reached the Musselshell trading-post, and the first thing that struck the eye was a big bearded and thoroughly wild looking man, leaning on a club, his legs bare, and his only piece of clothing a much shrunken flannel shirt. His long hair and bushy beard swayed in puffs of hot wind. He seemed entirely unconscious of the picture he was making, and seemed entirely ignorant or indifferent to the snickers and whispers of the staring passengers.

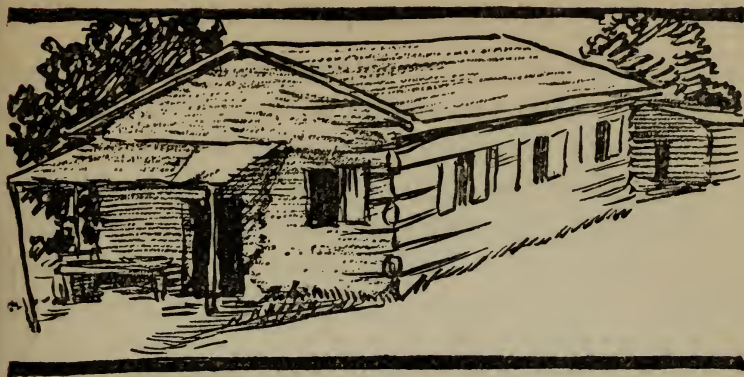
"Funny, isn't he?" said the Captain to Bob and Enith. "That's Liver-eating-Johnson."

"Where'd he get such a funny name?"

"The same place the woman passenger lost her hair. He's a well-known character in this part of the country."

The boat was stopping to let the woman off, and Bob and Enith knew that they never would hear how that woman lost her hair.

The big man did not come to meet the woman, nor did anyone else. She went alone to a forlorn looking hut half-buried in brush. Some sacks of provisions and a few newspapers were thrown on shore. The big man nodded, and the boat moved on.



Chapter 6

UNCLE MARK GAINS TIME

SHORTLY before they reached Cow Island the boat on which Uncle Mark had gone forward passed them on its way back to St. Louis. It was racing with the *Nellie Peck*, stirring up the sand and mud at a terrific rate.

"Mark must be at Aunt Lena's by this time," Ted remarked.

"Oh, yes," Father replied, "Mark is well rested by now!"

The farther West the steamers progressed the lower the river got, until sometimes there was danger of being held at Fort Benton all winter. The Captains disliked this. They preferred to put the freight and passengers ashore before the goal was reached, and return to St. Louis while the trip was possible.

So when the Bells reached Fort Benton, they found that Uncle Mark had not passed through

the place at all. He would easily have been noticed anywhere, being pale and clean, quite different from the average Westerner who seemed to remember everybody he ever saw, and when and where.

"By what trail did he come?" the clerk at the stage office asked Father when he inquired for Mark.

"By the *Flirt*."

The man laughed. "She 'didn't come this far but put her passengers and freight ashore at the Marias River and went back. I reckon she wanted to win that race more'n anything else, 'cause the river ain't low enough yet to tie up a boat."

"But there were an awful lot of passengers!"

"Yes, soldiers. The Government sent wagons and mules for them, but the rest have to come up as best they can."

So, instead of reaching the Bird Tail ahead of the family, Uncle Mark kept them waiting two days at Fort Benton.

Ted was not a bit sorry. He was hypnotized by his surroundings, dazed but beaming. Benton was the most important settlement of the northwest, and fairly seethed with story-book people and happenings. There were river-men, trappers, Indians, breeds, traders, miners, scouts, soldiers, freighters, merchants, bull-whackers, tenderfoots, and a goodly sprinkling of criminals. These crowded the unpaved streets, did business at the trading-posts, stores, saloons, gambling-houses, dance-halls, and at

the Indian village just outside the fort. Freight-outfits with oxen—a few with mules—were constantly arriving from or going to Helena, Deer Lodge, Bozeman, Silver Bow, Virginia City, and smaller places. Two stage lines were picking up and dropping passengers.

The second evening after supper Mother, Father, Bob, Enith and Bertie, all bathed and dressed up, went down the road to meet the *Flirt's* freight outfit, and enquire about Uncle Mark. The procession soon came in sight, winding snakelike in and out of the curves of the dusty road. The heavy canvas-covered wagons had from ten to eighteen oxen to draw their loads.

"Mark won't be with that caravan," said Father. "Too much dirt."

Mother agreed with him and they continued to saunter towards it, fearing another delay. Each wagon had a driver of its own, and the voices in sing-song arguments with the cattle, the sharp pop of the long-lashed whips, could be heard long before the outfit could be seen. Some drivers were wading through the ankle-deep dust, while others dozed astride the wheel-ox. Most of them were unfurling a strange medley of swear-words which did not sound shocking at all because there was no anger in them, and these accomplished what the lash could not.

The Bell family stood out of the reach of the dust that rose heavenward in thick clouds, waving

greetings to each driver as he passed, hoping to get near enough to ask about Uncle Mark. The yellow dust was fine and powdery, and completely disguised wagon, man, horse and ox. Way at the end of the line the wagon kept a larger space between itself and the others, while the oxen swung along more slowly and the driver was more quiet. As he seemed approachable, Father and Mother went to him to make enquiries, and what was their surprise to recognize Uncle Mark! Really the clean, particular, Uncle Mark himself, changed into an almost unrecognizable bull-whacker.

Uncle Mark did not often show feeling, but he was so glad to see what he called civilized beings once more, that he hugged and kissed everyone, and then gave his opinion of the company that had sold him his ticket to Fort Benton.

"At Cow Island I made a bargain with a squaw for a pony to take me to Benton right away," he said. "She refused money and pointed to my green silk handkerchief. So I gave it to her, asking her to bring the horse early the next morning. But she did not bring the horse, and everybody laughed at me for thinking she would. I had resolved to walk to Benton, when the boss of this outfit asked me to take a few thousand pounds of freight along, as one of his drivers was on a spree. So here I am. Where's Ted?"

"He walked to an Indian village yesterday to buy

a horse and go to meet you. I hope nothing has happened to him," Mother answered.

When they reached town Uncle Mark took his valise from the wagon and hastened to the hotel saying he never wanted to see an ox again so long as he lived. Teasdale was standing near and at once applied for the job that Mark had thrown over, and so became a freighter on the road where the Bells were to live.

They were turning towards the hotel when they saw Ted coming on a piebald cayuse with a brightly dressed squaw in front of him. She had promised to bring him to the fort in time for the stage if he would give her the bright blue silk handkerchief around his neck, which he did, noticing that the green one on her head had a familiar look.

It did not take very long for Uncle Mark to appear, all washed and dressed as though he were going to a party. Of course he recognized the squaw and his handkerchief right away, but he paid no attention to them. Ted had been unable to find a single horse for sale in the village.

Early the next morning when the family stood all ready to board the stage for the Bird Tail, Ted gave them the surprise of their lives by declaring that he was not going along. He had already secured a job with the big fur company, and would stay till he had had his fill of Benton life.

Mother began to weep, but there was not time for arguing, as the stage was waiting. Ted promised

to visit them by Christmas, if not sooner, so they got into the coach and were off.

It certainly was a bumpy trip! The stage was one of those red, green or yellow Wells-Fargo overland stages that could bound higher on level ground than could a grasshopper for its size. Just like the one in which Horace Greeley went West, which a herd of buffaloes, after watching it a while, rushed upon, and knocked completely over, indignant at its bright color and senseless antics.

No doubt Mother would have been glad to have something knock this one over for just a short rest, but the only buffaloes in sight were too far away to be obliging.

Still, everything was immensely interesting—the great stretches of prairie ending in the sky; the distant mountain ranges circling around the coach to keep it in sight; antelopes and coyotes scampering out of the way; rattlers disputing the right-of-way till their heads were cut off with the whip-popper; large villages of indignantly barking prairie-dogs; a lone rider against the skyline; the herd of buffaloes far away, and many, many kinds of flowers.

So the Bells sailed merrily on. Bertie lost his hat the first thing, and it was five years before he got another. Mother was tossed so hard against the wooden frame of the canvas top that her head ached. Enith bit her tongue till it bled. But these little things did not seem to matter, and were soon forgotten.

It was just getting dark when the stage drew up before Uncle Robert's house, and there stood all the family with outstretched arms to welcome them.

"Is this the house?" Enith whispered to Bob, looking at the low log building which did not seem different from the stables and other outbuildings. But inside it was very different.

There was a large pleasant living-room, three bed-rooms, a kitchen, office, and long dining-room down the center of which stood a table with white cloth and loaded with the best things they had seen in months—fried chicken, fluffy tea-biscuit, stewed black-berries with thick cream, and other goodies.

All the buildings had the regulation dirt roofs that prevented the Indians from setting fire to them with burning brands.

A short distance from the house, on a slight elevation, stood a taller frame barn building, the stable for the stage-company's relay horses, in charge of Charlie, the stock-tender, true friend and chum of the children.

Chapter 7

THE VOW

IMMEDIATELY after supper Fred and Annette took Bob and Enith to see the sights—their fort at the claybank; the big clear spring sunk in a wreath of forget-me-nots; the nest of a belated wild duck where hatching was still in progress; and their cousin's white fenced little grave out on the flat. It was hard to come in by dark, so much was there to be seen and shown.

When they returned to the house where the family usually gathered around the smudge under the straight firs which Uncle Robert planted there, Uncle Robert was reclining in his big rustic chair and saying to the others, "Yes, it is all true, what that man Teasdale told you about life at the gold-diggings, but I guess he was East when the Vigilantes formed."

"Vigilantes? What are they?" Father asked.

For a moment Uncle Robert hesitated, from habit. For a member of this secret organization to speak of it to strangers was a breach of loyalty. They had their spies everywhere, even as the road-agents had, and anyone who betrayed their plans or even their names had to pay the penalty. How-

ever, this was right in the family, so Uncle Robert answered.

"The Vigilantes are a secret organization that formed for the protection of the honest people when all the criminals from the west coast and the south flocked to Montana during the gold-stampede, and carried things with a high and bloody hand. No man could protect his property and his life at the same time. The arch-fiend, Ives, boldly declared that it was so much easier to shoot a man and take his gold than to dig or pan the gold yourself. He had killed more men than he could remember at the time we ended his career so abruptly. Of course the Missouri River and the Salt Lake stages did carry millions in gold and hundreds of people back to the States, but they got through by chance. Scores of men who had made their fortunes and started East to enjoy them, disappeared and were never found nor heard from."

Bob and Enith sat and listened open-mouthed. And Uncle Robert, while refilling his pipe went on, "We Vigilantes had no regular meetings, but when two or three of us met on the streets or elsewhere we'd exchange a few words in passing, took a vote that way, and by morning a rigid form hanging from a tree would tell of Vigilante law and order."

"How do Vigilantes look?" Bob earnestly asked, and Uncle Robert laughed. "Pretty much like other men that you see all the time—except, of course, your Father," he teasingly added. "When

they are out seeking a criminal they carry a pair of revolvers, a shot-gun or rifle, a pair of blankets, only the most necessary food, and—some rope. Alcohol is forbidden."

Bob noticed that Fred was writing down things on a bit of crumpled paper, and he ran to get his book, asking Uncle Robert to wait. As soon as he was seated beside Fred near the window through which the lamp was sending feeble rays, Uncle Robert went on:

"The Captain of the Vigilantes is an intimate friend of mine, but I guess I won't mention his name yet. He is cool, strong, brave, and knows the territory from end to end. He also knows the bandit leaders. They hate and fear him, and he still has some cleaning up to do before he retires. The civil law with its enormous expenses and long delays is worse than useless."

"What laws did the Vigilantes make, father?" Fred asked.

"Simply these, that from the day they formed there would be no more murdering in Montana, no more fighting with weapons, no more stealing, or destruction of property. Anyone violating these laws would pay the price."

"Do Vigilantes punish Indians, too?"

"Rarely. That is the Government's job. But we have had to do it."

"How can Vigilantes tell outlaws from other men?" Bob wanted to know.

“The road-agents and all members of their band wear their ties in sailor-knots and shave their faces down to chin whiskers and mustaches ——”

Aunt Lena now appeared, extinguishing the lamp near the window and bringing her guitar. Uncle Robert gave Bob a wink, afterwards explaining that Aunt Lena did not approve of outlaw talk before the children, though he himself thought it better to explain things to them than let them gather facts from strangers. That kind of talk was the common daily conversation all along the Benton road.

In spite of her tired fingers—having washed a mountainous heap of dishes with Charlie’s help—Aunt Lena fell briskly to playing the accompaniment of many songs, while the others sang, swatted mosquitoes, and replenished the smudge-fire. In about an hour they all retired because the travellers were weary.

Fred, Bob, Enith and Annette were up and away early the next morning, running out to an immense carpet of blue lupines which held the city children wordless. They were almost as wonderful as the acres of roses on the river banks. The banks of the creek were crowded with these and many other flowers: prairie-chickens scolded, moving out of their way so leisurely that they might have been picked up with the bare hands; prairie-dogs sat up on their mounds indignantly warning them to keep away, their high little voices just like the squeaks of dolls

when you poke them in the middle; and up in dry-gulch the fire-scarred trees held towards them golden balls of luscious gum.

Is it any wonder that in such surroundings Bob, Fred, Enith and Annette sometimes shirked their work and had to be punished? Each one had certain jobs to do before play could begin, and one day when all four had been punished hard, Fred called an indignation meeting under the willows at the creek. The spot was a hidden one, and they had to fight their way to it through scratchy thorns and twisting vines.

"Annette and I have held a lot of these meetings," Fred explained when they were seated in a circle, "and we have a scheme in which you must join."

"What is it?" Bob asked, and Fred motioned them closer together.

"This," he said, lowering his voice and looking mighty important, "some day when our parents are so cruel that we can't stand it any longer, we're going to run away and live wild, like the Indians."

Bob shivered, his eyes getting big with wonder, and Enith cuddled against Annette. "But—but wouldn't the Indians kill us?"

"Naw," Fred answered with assurance. "Indians are good to children—especially white children. And they never, never, whip their own children."

"No fair fooling!"

"You bet they don't! They say it breaks their

spirit, and makes cowards of 'em! That's what they say, and I guess they know!"

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if they adopted us!" Enith suggested.

"That's part of the scheme," Fred informed her. "We'll run away, pretending we're lost, and we'll let 'em find us. Then they'll adopt us and we can carry out our scheme."

"What is the scheme?"

"To form a band of junior Vigilantes which will astonish all the world because its object will be nothing less 'n killing Sitting Bull himself before he kills all the white people of Montana."

"Kill Sitting Bull!" Bob exclaimed. "You'd think that a pretty silly idea if you'd a seen him like Enith and I did, surrounded by his fierce guards."

"It isn't silly! Can't you wait till I get through? We'll form a band of Vigilantes—but first, we'll chuck that silly grammar that Uncle Mark is pestering us about all the time, and we'll speak like sensible Westerners ——"

"Goody!" Edith exclaimed. "He says our talk is *pernicious*."

"We'll form our Vigilantes. Maybe we can get the two Hansen boys who live at the next stage-station to join us. Their mother is dead and their father whips them till they're nearly dead. But they're tough otherwise, and aren't afraid of anything except their father. Twenty miles down the

road are the Colbert children, Henry and Fanny. Fanny's a cry-baby, so maybe we won't take them in. Anyway, there are four of us, and that's enough to make a start."

"But—but aren't we coming back some time?" Enith wanted to know.

"Yes, when our parents are good and sorry. And when we tell 'em about killing Sitting Bull, they'll be ashamed for having punished us so much."

"How do we start?"

"Like I told you. We'll run away and let any Indians find us and adopt us. We'll pretend to be friendly with 'em till they trust us, and all the time we'll be working secretly to get near Sitting Bull."

"How?"

"By changin' tribes whenever we can, working our way to Dakota, all the time pretendin' we're just lost, and when we are in Sitting Bull's band, we'll draw lots about the killing. After he trusts us maybe we can kill him in a way that looks like an accident. The sooner we start the better if we want to save the lives of our parents and everybody. The Indians are suspicious, but they'll never suspect children of scheming such a big thing, and for that reason we'll be safe."

"Maybe we can get Uncle Ted's organ back!" Enith exclaimed.

"Organs can wait. The first thing to do is to learn how to live wild, because we may be lost a long time before any Indians come across us. Every

spring and fall a band of Blackfeet camp about half a mile up the road, but my father never lets Annette or me go near 'em because Annette was stolen that time, you know. We'll have to learn a lot from Indians some way—how they set up their tepees so fast, how they tan hides, how they make bows and arrows, how they make pemmican, how they dry their meat in strips, how they make buckskin, and how they keep warm in winter. Gee, during a blizzard it's hard enough for us to keep warm right in the house, with two stoves going!"

"You'll have to be our leader, Fred," Bob declared.

"Yes, but if we have a boss it'll be just like home," Annette argued, knowing Fred's aptness for bossing her.

"Well, we'll start with Fred, and afterwards we can vote on it," Bob explained, and the girls said nothing. What was the use?

"All right," Fred agreed, straightening up. "I'll be the leader, but you'll all have to promise to obey me without disputing. Will you do that?"

"We will!" came instantly from Bob.

"Then first of all we'll have to make the vow, like the Vigilantes. Give me your right hand, Bob. There. Now Enith you take Annette's hand across ours, like that, and we'll say the vow three times all together. Let me say it first alone, so you'll know how."

Fred closed his eyes, and turning his face upward

solemnly declared, "*We four, Fred, Bob, Enith and Annette, herewith pledge ourselves to run away, let Indians adopt us, and get Sitting Bull. Now everybody say it three times, and very loud.*"

"We four, Fred, Bob, Enith and Annette, herewith pledge ourselves to run away, let Indians adopt us, and get Sitting Bull! We four, Fred, Bob, Enith and Annette, herewith pledge ourselves to run away, let Indians adopt us, and get Sitting Bull!! We four, Fred, Bob, Enith and Annette, herewith pledge ourselves to run away, let Indians adopt us, and get Sitting Bull!!!"

The vow ended in a shout, and they feared it might have reached the house. But they did not laugh. It was very serious business. Fred, being Captain, at once gave orders: "Enith and Annette, you'll have to start right away to collect all the old clothes, bedding, shoes, and other things that are not used every day and won't be missed. Bob, you'll help me gather rusty nails and straighten them, find old rubber boots, moccasins, ropes, straps, pieces of harness, and broken garden tools that have been thrown away. Everything is to be hidden in the cache behind the corn-field. And we all four must be on the watch, all the time, for stray caps, bullets, and powder. It'll take almost a year to get ready, and no time should be wasted. On the very last day we'll take the cow, the horse, the dog and the chicken, and we'll go where no white people will ever think of looking for us."

That sounded very grand. After every scolding or other kind of punishment they would hold a meeting under the willows, repeating their vow, looking over their stock, and trying to decide whether they had enough without waiting a whole year. Always they sneaked to the meeting-place by different routes so the brush would not get worn into a path and betray their secret den. Mother and Aunt Lena often wondered at the badly scratched arms and legs, but no matter how they hurt and grew sorer, neither the boys or girls betrayed how they got them. Indeed, the sorer they were, the prouder the Vigilantes were of them.

"One of the first things to learn when we get a chance," Fred announced at a meeting, "is to learn to dance."

"Dance! You're crazy, Fred! Why should we dance to kill Sitting Bull?" Bob asked, and the girls laughed with him.

"I guess you smarties don't know that dancing is more important to an Indian than his food," Fred answered with dignity, but getting red in the face at their laughter. "Indians never undertake a single important thing without having a dance about it, before and after, too, like the war-dance, the hunting-dance, the scalp-dance, the death-dance, the harvest-dance, and every other kind. If we're going to live with 'em we'll have to dance, too, or be suspected right away."

"Who'll teach us?"

"I don't know. We'll have to be on the watch, and in the meantime we mustn't neglect our scouting for Indians. Bob, you'll go north one mile every evening, and all alone. Enith, you'll go south a mile every evening, all alone. Annette, you'll go east a mile every evening all alone, and when I come from the west, you'll all report to me at our meeting-place." They accepted the order silently. "Another thing," Fred went on, importantly, "we must collect all kinds of presents for the Indians. You can do more with a bright rag than with a gun, as every explorer has found out. So, Annette, and Enith, save all your beads, patches and ribbons."

The girls agreed, deciding immediately which of their treasures they would *not* give.

Chapter 8

THE WRITING IN THE SKY

CHARLIE's stable was a delightful place. The children could play all they wanted to in the loft without being scolded for trampling the hay; they could slide down the chutes right into the mangers to make the horses snort; they could chew the wheat when there was any, and take nibbles at Charlie's nice smelling chewing-tobacco, the girls getting deathly sick, of course, and being laughed at by the boys.

Next best—aside from their meeting-place, of course,—they liked the evening story hour in front of the house when the work was all done and Uncle Robert would tell them on the sly interesting things about outlaws, Vigilantes, road-agents, Indians, bears and wolves. As soon as Aunt Lena and Mother appeared, the singing would begin, and that, too, was fun. Uncle Robert had a good voice. So did Aunt Lena, and Mother, and the children were always supposed to join in the chorus, which they did with all their might. They liked especially the "Bull-whacker's song," "In the good old Colony Times," "Bob Ridley," and "There was a Frog." At least, the boys liked these better because they could make a lot of noise, but Enith and Annette were more pleased when Aunt Lena softly began

the introductions to "Belle Mahone," "You ask what makes this Darkey weep," "Nettie Moore," and others that had much sadness.

The Frog song with its heemo-himo, rumstickabuma-diddle chorus often came very near bringing the boys a whipping after they had gone to bed, for they kept making up new words and could not stop even when everybody else was asleep. The board partitions were very thin.

Sometimes Fred and Bob would talk outlaw and Vigilante till nearly morning, Fred teaching Bob, among other things, the speech with which outlaws usually introduced themselves when they unexpectedly swooped down on a new settlement. They would burst into a saloon where a quiet game of cards and dancing were going on, and shout, "Whoop! I'm from Pike County, Missouri! I'm ten feet high! My parlor is the Rocky Mountains! I smell like a wolf, I drink water out of the brook like a horse! Look out, I'm going to turn loose! Whoop!" And then everybody would duck and disappear.

The first time Bob repeated the speech after Fred, he began softly because everybody was going to sleep. But gradually his voice grew louder and louder without his realizing it till the last whoop came from his hoarse throat high and sharp, and half a minute later Mother came in, scolding, threatening to whip them, talking back over her shoulder so Father could hear how severe she was, and finally

beating the bedclothes loudly, ending with, "There! I guess that'll keep you still for the rest of the night!" And she went away.

"She never touched me," Bob snickered under the blanket.

"Nor me, either," Fred whispered. "She always fools our fathers that way."

"Say, Fred, how about those blizzards your father told us about? They must be awfully dangerous."

"You bet they are! But we've just got to get used to all those things. I'll tell you how the Vigilantes protect themselves—Duck! Here she comes again! Snore! Snore for all your worth!"

So they both snored all out of tune, and Mother had to hide her face, going away without giving the bedclothes another beating.

The next day was so filled with chores that a secret meeting was out of the question. And there was so much to be discussed that they had no hope of talking enough after going to bed. Besides, the girls had to share in the ideas about the scheme.

"Let's ask to sleep outdoors to-night," Fred suggested. "We'll just have to get used to sleeping out soon. Of course they won't let us."

To their surprise permission was readily given, and they were so delighted about it that all four did their evening chores without being reminded a single time, and got through early.

Immediately after supper they carried their blankets and pillows out on the loco weed slope

and made one wide bed. Mother told them to keep on their stockings and underwear, as the nights were sharp, and the stockings would help keep out bugs and things. They were so eager to force the night that they cuddled under the blankets before dark.

It had been a windy day and the sky was now a cyclone of radiant color, like smokeless forest fires and blue rivers running through them. At times the illuminated cloud-masses looked as though they would tumble down on them, but they only painted the prairie pink and made a burning castle of the Bird Tail rock.

"We'll have to find some name for our secret band," said Fred. "Everybody think hard of the thing he likes best."

So they thought and thought till Fred called for the names. "Enith, have you thought of something good?"

"I can't think of anything in the world that I like better than dumplings with a whole lot of browned butter poured over them."

"For heaven's sake! You think that's funny, don't you! Annette, what did you think of?"

"You know well enough that I like two kittens better'n ——"

Fred snorted with disgust. "Just listen to that, Bob! It's always like that when you take girls into anything that's big and earnest. Dumplings and kittens! I just think we'll have to leave the girls out of this scheme."

"You can't! You wouldn't dare—because we've got the secret!" Annette hotly cried. "Why don't you give a name yourself, instead of bossing all the time!"

"It's my business to boss, and I now order you to keep still. Anybody who lisps shouldn't sputter."

Annette was near tears of vexation. She and Enith whispered a moment and Annette declared, "Enith and I are going to—to — What's the word, Enith?"

"Mutiny," Enith whispered. She had learned the word on the boat.

"Yes, mutiny," Annette continued, again facing Fred. "Bob made you Captain, but we think we ought to have something to say about it. And I know that Indians don't make chiefs of their men till they have done something brave."

"Mutiny," Fred whispered to Bob, and they snickered, but just the same the word made them more respectful. "What must we do, to be brave?"

"You'll have to kill an Indian, or a bear, or maybe only a buffalo, all by yourself. If Bob does it first, he'll be our Captain."

"All right. Who'll be Captain while we're looking for a chance?"

"You may stay Captain till you or Bob find the chance. We're tired of being made fun of, remember that."

"But you'll have to obey me while I'm Captain."

"Of course we will."

They lay talking and dreamily watching the color overhead fading away till presently a shaft of bright light rose suddenly out of the northern skyline, and grew larger so rapidly that in no time at all it seemed to be hanging directly over their bed, swaying this way and that, as though trying to pick out one of them for a sacrifice. It kept stretching and contracting like a signal fire, while blue electrical sparks darted through it everywhere. It was pale blue at the bottom, and pink at the top.

"What's that?" Bob tremulously whispered, as they all sat up with fast beating hearts, ashamed to seem afraid—that is, Bob and Enith were ashamed. Annette ducked deeper under the cover, and Fred acted as though he knew all about it, though his voice was a little husky as he answered, "It is a spirit sign to us from somewhere. The Indians learn all their wonderful things from signs like that. We must watch it carefully."

"What do you think it means?"

Fred thought a few moments and answered, "It means that we should call ourselves the Northern Lights. We can be Vigilantes, of course, but if the folks hear that word they'll know what we mean, and they'll meddle. But no one will know what we mean if we speak of the Northern Lights."

They all liked this idea very much, and coming out of their coverings talked and talked about what they were going to do.

"And when we have something important to say

to each other before the folks, we'll just pass each other, whispering a word, and—oh, look!"

Fred pointed to the sky where the light suddenly divided into seven separate shafts, each one a little bigger than its neighbor, and dying out one by one. The tallest one stayed longer than the others, and seemed to be looking directly at the Northern Lights before it went out with a snap.

"And what does that mean?" Bob awesomely asked, and Fred promptly answered, "It means that we shall have seven chances to run away and carry out our plan. Each chance will be a little harder than the last, so the sooner we get to work the easier for us."

"And if we don't get Sitting Bull when our seven chances are used, will our scheme be a failure?"

"You bet it will. Let's make up a sign language right away so we can talk before the others when it is necessary. And let's make some sign of greeting, which tells whether you're a Northern Light or not. Everybody think of something."

So everybody thought and thought and they finally adopted the initials N.L. by touching first the nose and then the lip, the nose meaning thorough investigation, and the lip, silence and secrecy. For their emblem they chose a knot of rope, like the Vigilante noose, agreeing to send it to their Captain, without a written word, whenever they had been successful in an undertaking to which they were pledged.

"And now the report of the scouts," said the Captain. "Bob, did you see anything suspicious or encouraging today?"

"Nothing but the grass waving."

"Enith, did you see anything suspicious or encouraging today?"

"Nothing but the grass waving."

"Annette, did you see anything suspicious or encouraging today?"

"Nothing but the grass waving."

As there was no one who could call on Fred for his report, no one ever knew whether he scouted or not.

Chapter 9

THE PLAN BEGINS

FRED asked his mother if the four of them might take food and wraps and go away for an all-day picnic. When out of sight of the house they would change their course, make for the hills, and disappear in the mountains. "May we go early, early, in the morning?" he asked.

As they were always watched more than they suspected, they had no trouble in getting permission, "Provided," said Aunt Lena, "you don't have to be scolded a single time before you start."

"All right," Fred hopefully agreed, "we'll do our work and everything just as well as we can." They started off to get ready, and, as always on busy days, had to take care of the babies. "Darn those old babies," Fred disgustedly cried. So the Northern Lights took the unwelcome babies down to the willows with them.

"I know what we'll do!" Bob exclaimed, struck with an idea, "We'll make believe Rose and Bertie are bandits, and we'll practise on them!"

Fred was delighted, but the girls, just like girls always do, objected because they were afraid the babies would get hurt. "You boys are so rough," Enith protested.

"We won't be this time, honest," Fred promised, and after a little more parleying the two sides came to an understanding.

First of all Rose and Bertie were disguised as road-agents. Fred and Bob made the disguises while the girls kept the road-agents from getting cross and impatient by doing finger tricks and giving them dried prunes, one at a time. From an old calico apron hanging in shreds on the bushes, Fred and Bob made neckties which they put on Bertie and Rose and tied in sailor knots; then they found a piece of fire-charred wood and made beards which ended in points on their tender chins. Next they fastened their dresses between their legs to look like trousers, and then hid them in the brush, telling them they were road-agents in ambush waiting to hold up the stage. Of course they agreed, understanding nothing except that there were more goodies in Enith's and Annette's hands, and that they must mind, in order to get them.

Fred sent Bob out to scout, ordering him to bring a couple of gunny-sacks from the bunk-house; and the others buckled on their wooden knives and pistols and got their horses ready. The horses were forked willow sticks with the bark peeled off.

While awaiting the return of the scout, Fred practised shooting at a target, the long wooden bullets going out as swiftly as arrows.

Soon the scout came and breathlessly announced that he had discovered the den of the two very worst

outlaws of the country, and that no time must be lost as the villains were preparing to break camp. So, after each had received separate orders from the Captain, they leaped astride their horses and dashed away to surround the camp of the road-agents, who were still interested in prunes, and showed it.

The Northern Lights hewed their way through rose thorns and strangle-vine, which grew very thick here, and took the outlaws completely by surprise. They led them solemnly to a big willow with a strong branch to which Bob and Fred securely fastened the sacks and placed a wooden soap-box under one.

Then the Northern Lights went through some secret business which the Captain alone understood, and, everything being ready, the prisoners were told that they were to be hanged. Bertie came first. He was placed on the box and then lifted into the sack with the edge under his arms so he could be free from the arms up. He was not in the least repentant, and Enith kept making signs to him behind the Captain's back, telling him not to be afraid, they were only playing, and so on.

"Have you anything to say?" the Captain sternly asked the prisoner. Bertie had three fingers in his mouth and at the question grinned and sneezed so violently that Enith had to hasten to him with the handkerchief. "Say I'm innocent," she kept whispering to him, and he answered with another sneeze

which the Captain accepted; and turning to his Vigilantes he said, "Of course we can't put the handkerchief over his face now, so——Men do your duty!"

The three pushed the bag from under Bertie's feet and he disappeared into the sack, which was not intended. They had to lift him and let him hang out as before, and he greatly enjoyed the swinging. Baby Rose eagerly reached for her scaffold, demanding to be hanged, and when her trap was sprung she screeched with delight. The prisoners looked at each other so joyously that Fred was disgusted enough to want to slap their faces. "They should be sad, and say their prayers," he declared going towards them with uplifted hand, and Enith stepped before him shouting, "Don't dare to touch them! If you do I'll—I'll tell on you! You and Bob are getting altogether too—too *pernicious*."

No telling how the boys might have resented the insult had they not all been diverted by the loud screams of Nettie Moore, the big mother-pig who came tearing down the path with a pitchfork hanging to her side. She had rolled on it. Behind her came all the other pigs, snorting, screaming, making a terrific noise. Father was following Nettie trying to step on the handle of the fork, and every time he lifted his leg a pig would get under it and throw him off the track. They were as crazy as when a pig got slaughtered. Father was coatless, his long locks floating backwards, and his spectacles clutched

in one hand. He looked so funny that the Vigilantes had to laugh, especially when he made an extra long leap for the fork and landed forcibly on the ground where he remained seated while the Vigilantes saved Nettie's life—or her bacon.

When the pigs got through nosing Nettie's wound and telling her how sorry they were, the Vigilantes herded them back to their pens. Father smeared lard and carbolic acid on Nettie's sore.

While watching the performance the Vigilantes got a whiff of burnt hide, and they galloped to the branding-corral where Nero, the big bull-calf, was under the iron at the moment. He was terribly hard to manage. His horns, though only two inches long, kept the three men hopping out of their reach, and finally made them jump over the fence. He followed over, but instead of pursuing his tormentors he ran off over the prairie. It did not matter, as his marking was finished.

Then little Katie was branded, and she never made any fuss at all because she was so used to being handled and petted that she did not know what was coming till the hot iron touched her. She cried "Ma!" just once, and when they were through she lay like dead till Charlie threw a bucket of water over her head, and she opened her eyes and rose to her feet. Old Pet, Katie's mother, was watching it all and made enough noise for two, running around the outside of the corral, bellowing, trying

to force her head between the bars, and kept away only by the club in Father's hands.

One of the sudden black hail-storms interrupted the branding for a while, sending everybody under cover as fast as possible. The hailstones were big enough to hurt, and while the men were shaking them from their hats Mother suddenly asked, "Where are Bertie and Rose?"

The Northern Lights started. They had forgotten all about the hanging road-agents! Without a word Bob and Fred bolted from the house and found the two babies sagged to the bottom of the bags, asleep but sobbing, showing how hard they had cried before becoming exhausted. They were pretty wet, and sniffled a lot.

Usually when things went wrong and Mother wanted to warn Fred, Bob, Enith and Annette of coming trouble, she would make big eyes at them without saying a word; they knew what to expect. So when the babies now began to sneeze, Mother looked at the boys with big, meaning eyes, as she silently helped Aunt Lena change Rose's and Bertie's wet clothes. Soon Aunt Lena began to scold, and Mother quickly diverted her, talking fast, trying to save the picnic for tomorrow. Every time Aunt Lena wiped Rose's flowing nose, she started afresh, and Mother headed her off till the Northern Lights succeeded in getting beyond the sound of Aunt Lena's words.

They were very grateful to Mother, and all might

have ended well had not Fred insisted on meddling, out in the corral where Father, Charlie, and Uncle Robert were having a dreadful time trying to brand a new wild cow. In order to have her stand still at all, she had to be driven into the narrow pen, or chute, with a bar at her back so she could move neither forward nor backward. To get her into the chute was the big question. The men were almost worn out with her antics. She would allow them to drive her close to the opening, and then would fool them by tossing her head and darting past it. She was the first cow Father had bought for his own.

Fred saw at once what ought to be done, and without saying a word to anyone he found a big club, crawled into the corral, and stood close to the fence at the spot where the cow always changed her mind. He would head her off on the very next round.

The three men, coaxingly purring, "So, boss! So, boss," were closing her in, narrowing the circle with every step, and she again tossed her head and was galloping past the entrance when Fred suddenly jumped before her and shook the club in her face.

As she could not halt so abruptly, her front legs stopped, but her hind legs kept a-going, and the result was a wonderful summersault which broke her neck.

While everyone stood stunned, hardly believing their eyes, Fred disappeared. Several hours later when Father was going to the spring for water he

found Fred sitting at the clay-bank with his head between his hands, looking very sad. Father got the water and when he came back he said, "Come on, Fred, supper's ready." Just like that.

Not a word about the cow. Fred rose with a mountain rolling off his chest, and eagerly took the pail from Father's hand, carrying the water all the way home, though the pail was the great big and terribly heavy one. But at the house Uncle Robert scolded him good and hard for meddling where he had no business.

So there they were again.

"Two chances lost already," Fred regretfully declared when they met under the willows. "At that rate the seven will be gone before we've done a single thing. It's impossible to get away without permission because of all the stuff we have to carry. A picnic was just the best chance of all, and now I've spoiled it."

They were sent to bed early, and the next day Uncle Robert and his family left for their new home in the canyon. Uncle Mark, who had been sick all the time, went with them, and the Bells never saw him again.

Chapter 10

BLUE BEARD

BOB and Enith, playing at the creek, saw a band of antelopes coming from the Bird Tail spring to the flat below it. They ran for their bows and arrows. As usual, they were minding Bertie, and he was a lot of bother because he could not run fast enough. So they caught him by the arms and dragged him along, not minding his cries and kicks. He kept crying harder all the time, saying they were hurting him, and when his face suddenly got very white they were scared. Enith knelt before him, anxiously asking, "Where does it hurt, Bertie?"

"My arm!" he wailed, pushing her away when she tried to look at it. She told Bob to go alone and she carried Bertie home. Mother removed his clothes and found his arm very red and swollen. It was not broken, for it did not hang that way; but the pain increased, even when Father treated it ever so skillfully, and for several nights Bertie, Mother and Father did not sleep at all.

Mother became alarmed and decided to take Bertie to Doctor Fogli so Father got the team ready. Bob and Enith had to stay to take care of the place. They were terribly afraid that Bertie

might lose his arm and they would be to blame. They were left in Charlie's care, and he was willing.

Sometimes, as an especial favor, Charlie would let them feel the bullet that had lodged in his wrist when he was caught in a fight with bad men, long ago. Teasdale and others used to tease him a lot about it and also about being the ignoramus who shot one of the strayed camels which the Government got from the Levant to act as beasts of burden on our western deserts. Charlie denied it, saying the animal was drowned in the Missouri when it got paralyzed at seeing so much perfectly good water going to waste.

Mother hated to leave Bob and Enith, but knew that Charlie would take care of them as well, even better than she herself would. She told them that if they would be good during her absence, they could ask her any wish they wanted when she came back, and she would grant it—if it was in her power. Naturally they thought of the scheme right away and were quite contented by the time Father, Mother, and Bertie drove off. A few yards from the house Father looked back and shouted, "Don't under any circumstances unchain Othello!" and they answered, "We won't."

The wagon was not out of sight before Bob and Enith decided that their big wish would be to visit the Mission for a whole week. Mother always liked to let them go there, but this time they would go over the hill and then turn towards Fred and

Annette. "There's so much travel on the road right now," said Bob, "that someone will surely pick us up, and with a whole week's start we'll surely get away this time."

"Why can't we do that now?"

"Well, Enith, aren't Father and Mother going right there themselves?"

That first day was all fun, building a wickiup, putting a fence around it, and roasting potatoes in the camp-fire. No orders about chores hung over them. Charlie milked the cows, fed the pigs and chickens, and washed the dishes all by himself. So the whole day was one grand picnic.

When evening came and Charlie went to his own stable, which stood some distance from the house, a kind of lonesome feeling came floating on the talkative night breeze which stopped right at the door where Bob and Enith sat looking up the road, wondering how far Mother and Father and Bertie were, how Bertie's arm was, and how long they would have to be away. Bertie was so brave, in spite of the pain.

To top the lonesome feeling Charlie soon came back saying, "My horses have strayed so far that I can't see them from the roof of the stable. I'll have to take Nellie and go after them. If I'm not back before bed time, don't be afraid." He saddled the horse and rode off towards the Mission.

Bob and Enith continued to sit in the doorway, trying to tell stories, which was no fun at all with

only two. The lonesome feeling insisted on coming back in the pauses; and there also came that strange booming noise, suggesting a buffalo stampede, but in reality was the vibration of the big falls of the Missouri River.

They kept looking toward the Mission road, hoping to see Charlie and the horses, afraid even to say the word "afraid." In one direction the stage road came running down a little hill about a mile away; while in the other direction the long prairie-grass rolled in waves to the foothills, making them think of their scouting.

Presently they were startled by the hoofbeats of a fast-galloping horse far down the road. Charlie would not ride like that. Besides, he had gone towards the Mission, and there would be the sound of many hoofs, if it were he. The moon was sufficiently bright to show a small moving dot in the distance, and it grew larger so rapidly that it made them nervous.

In a few minutes the rider drew rein at the door, a broad-shouldered, keen-eyed man, with bushy whiskers and heavy hair, looking very fierce. They hoped he would only ask about the road and move on, but he did not. He dismounted and peering over their heads into the dark house gruffly asked, "You two alone?"

"No, sir," Bob nervously answered. "Charlie is out for the horses, and we expect him back any minute."

"Get me something to eat, right away," he commanded, "and be quick about it. I'm in a hurry."

Enith remembered that they had eaten the last bread and her heart sagged.

"And you," the man turned to Bob, "show me where you keep the oats, and help me rub my cayuse down."

Enith hastened indoors and started a fire, and Bob led the way to the barn. The man's animal was panting and covered with lather.

"Have you a fresh horse on the premises?" he asked.

"No, sir. My father took the team, and Charlie is using the saddle-mare. We have some wild horses over in the hills, but we can't ever catch one."

The man's horse was carefully attended to, and Bob and the stranger returned to the house where Enith was doing her best with drop-biscuit, coffee, and pemmican. Bob helped her while the man walked restlessly in the dining-room, looking to the road often, and telling them to hurry, hurry!

He made them so nervous that they could not work as well as at other times. Bob whispered, "Doesn't he look exactly like Blue Beard? I'll bet he killed another wife and is running from the police! It seems to me we saw him somewhere before."

"Stop talking and give me what you have!" the man shouted, making them jump and nearly upset

the coffee. He seated himself at the table and began to eat the sauce.

"You take in his coffee, and by that time I'll have the biscuit out of the oven," said Enith.

Bob hesitated, but knew it would be cowardly to make Enith wait on the man when both were so afraid of him. So he took the coffee in, his hand shaking so that the cup rattled; and just as he was about to set it on the table, it tipped and sent the boiling contents over Blue Beard's knee. Both went up in the air, and then Bob ran to Enith. They stood trembling, not knowing what might happen. Soon Blue Beard broke into a hearty laugh, and called,

"Bring me some more! Don't be afraid. I haven't time to eat you—yet!"

Bob carried in some more coffee, the meat, and biscuit. It was a pretty good supper, but it did not last long. Blue Beard licked the platter clean, like the Jack Sprats, then tossed a five dollar gold piece on the table and hastened away on his tired horse.

They were greatly relieved, and watched him growing fainter and fainter in the distance. Othello, the black-faced pup that Charlie had given them, also watched the retreating form, and then turned his great melancholy eyes so wistfully on Bob and Enith, begging for attention, that, to tease Enith, Bob said he was going to unchain him for a little romp.



"She's a medicine woman, I guess"



"No you won't!" she declared, jerking him away from the kennel so hard that he fell on his face.

"Now I will do it, on purpose," he cried, holding Othello firmly with one hand and unsnapping the chain, intending to snap it fast again immediately; but Othello, though young, was wise enough to give a vigorous jerk at the right moment, and was free. And at that very instant a coyote, or a band of coyotes, let out a blood-curdling, bewildering, medley of cries and yelps, like a whole band of Indians on the war-path. Bob and Enith were still green enough to be pierced through and through at the wholly unexpected outburst and they flew into the house and slammed the door shut.

"They were pretty near," Enith whispered, trying to speak with a steady voice.

Bob's eyes were big and hollow with excitement. "I wonder if that was coyotes, or—or Indians, giving their decoy call!"

"Oh, Bob, what's—what's the use being scary!" Enith broke into tears.

"Gosh, Enith, don't be a baby at a time like this! We have to listen with all our might!" But Enith continued to cry, her sobs growing fainter when no more sounds came from over the creek. And soon Bob said, "Come on, Enith, let's wash the dishes, so we won't have so many to do in the morning."

This was a surprise, coming from Bob, and Enith at once rolled up her sleeves and scraped and stacked the dishes. When the water was hot Bob suddenly

remembered that he had not closed the chicken-house, and he made for the door, saying he would be right back.

"No sir-e-e-" Enith cried, catching him by the sleeve. "I know your tricks, Mr. Bob. You stay and wipe these dishes and then we can both go!"

"But the chickens are in danger!" He really was anxious to get Othello back on the chain, but Enith hung on to his coat, and they began to wrestle. He liked nothing better than to make her angry and red in the face, so he tickled her under the arms whenever she lifted them, and he tumbled her hair over her face and pressed her nose flat with his thumb, edging to the door. Suddenly he jerked himself free, threw the bar aside, pulled the door open, and bumped against something funny that was standing on the step.

Bob fell back, and he and Enith stared at the strange figure, not sure whether it was an Indian or a witch. For, though the creature looked at them with bright piercing eyes, it did not speak; and it was so thin that there could have been no flesh under its brown wrinkled skin. Its white hair hung in long loose strands about its face. Its clothes looked like a lot of carpet rags ready for the braiding, and its bony hands were like claws.

It came slowly into the room, leaning on a stick and shaking a long finger at them as though it had heard them quarreling. Bob glanced beyond it, outdoors, fearing there might be others, but saw noth-

ing. When it was before them it stopped and said something which sounded like a spoonful of water thrown into hot lard. Bob tried to remember his sign language, but found nothing to answer these queer sounds.

Both he and Enith decided that it was an old Indian woman, and they wondered what she could be doing here all alone, in the night—unless the rest of the tribe was coming. They asked the question by merely looking at each other, and Bob went to the door and looked in all directions. There was nothing in sight.

“She’s a—a medicine woman, I guess,” he whispered, and not knowing what else to do, he took the things out of an old rocker and pulling it forward, invited the woman to sit down. She did so at once, leaning far back and rocking with all her might, sticking out her moccasined feet, and showing her two remote teeth in a laugh of childlike joy.

Chapter 11

BULL-WHACKERS

Bob and Enith felt more at ease now, and Bob tried some of Fred's signs on the old woman who continued to laugh and rock all the harder till she played out as suddenly as she had appeared, her head sagging to one side like a weary spaniel's.

Enith stepped before her and put her fingers to her mouth, which meant are you hungry? The squaw nodded and Enith hastened to fix a place at the table; but the old woman sprang up and seized the meat in her shaking fingers, devouring it without chewing at all. Then she made a face, pointing to the salt, giving Enith to understand that she did not like that. She stuffed the remaining drop-biscuits into her bag and started for the door. Enith told her to wait while she got a lump of brown sugar which she wrapped in paper and gave to her. The woman's face brightened at the sight, and she flung her arms around Enith and kissed her on the mouth.

Enith did not like that, as the lips were soft and quivery, but she stood it bravely even when kissed a second time, pretending not to see Bob's teasing gestures of delight. Then the old woman went up to him and kissed him too.

They watched her while she hastened towards the

hills. At the telegraph-pole about fifty feet from the house she paused and put her ear to it, listening. In a few seconds she kicked the pole with her little moccasined foot and listened again. Three times she did this, then continued up the knoll, dropping from sight behind it, reappearing on the next knoll, dropping from sight again, till she became a mere gray goblin in a great gray space.

"It's a wonder she isn't afraid," said Bob. "I wouldn't go away all alone like that in the night, would you?"

"I should say not! Do you think she's an Indian witch?"

"She's an Indian spy, that's what she is." Here the loud scream of a chicken made their hearts drop, and they ran to the hen-house, lighting the lantern on the way, and on entering found the place in a terrific uproar. The scratching-shed was thick with dust from the floor to the ceiling, all kinds of feathers were flying around, bleeding chickens were trying to run up the walls, screaming chickens were fluttering to the roof, and some were running away over the prairie. And, in the midst of this blinding confusion, Master Othello was flying about like mad, having the time of his young life and firmly holding a squirming hen between his teeth. At sight of Bob he dropped the hen and came joyously forward till Bob got him near his kennel and chained him up.

Enith stood with her eyes popping out of her head

and her mouth open, but she said not a word, for Bob was already at the point of exploding with anger and regret, and one word from her would surely have brought a fight. But Enith could not help laughing when the big fine rooster that had cost so much money came out of a dark corner walking with all his old dignity even though his neck was bare of feathers and only a single one remained in his once beautiful tail! His comb hung red and wearily over one eye.

"Won't we catch it though!" Bob kept repeating, hastening from object to object, hoping to find things better than they seemed, and finding them worse. In one corner a pair of yellow chicken feet plainly wiggled, standing straight up out of the sand in which the pup had hastily buried their owner while doing such a rushing business, and not having time to make sure it was dead. Bob dug the poor thing out and put water on its head, and though it gasped twice, it could not be revived. All the time the pup sat in the dim distance, with his head to one side and his great melancholy eyes interestedly watching Bob's every move. They counted the chickens. Eight were missing. They searched all over the premises, but the eight remained missing.

"We'll have to cross the creek and go to the flat to look for them," Bob declared, but Enith held back. It was terribly dark over there, and the coyote that had started the evening all wrong let out another yelp, which, though farther away, held a joy-

ous sound and made them shudder and scamper to the house.

"Didn't I tell you she was a spy!" said Bob, taking down the shotgun. "Out on the prairie the Indians use the call of the coyote or the howl of the prairie-owl to signal to each other. She's telling 'em we're all alone."

Again Enith began to cry with fear. "Who—who's trying to be scary now?" she sobbed. "I wish Charlie would come."

"So do I. Come on, let's go into the cellar till he comes. He can't be so far by this time."

They stumbled down the narrow ladder and let the trap-door down over their heads, crouching in the dark corner opposite the grimy little pane of glass that was the cellar window, seeing the moon fly in and out of swift-moving clouds, hearing the coyote's receding calls growing more and more like Indian voices in their high-pitched war-cries.

Then again came silence. For nearly an hour they did not move. They longed to hear Othello bark, and were glad he did not. The clouds had succeeded in chasing each other to other parts of the sky, letting the white moonlight stream into the musty cellar, and presently the shadow of a man fell on the little pane of glass.

Enith pressed her face into Bob's back and asked, "Is—is it Charlie?"

"No," he answered. "Keep still!" He got the gun into position and they heard the footsteps go

to the back door where the man knocked. "It can't be an Indian," Bob whispered with relief. "I can hear his heels."

Several times the man knocked, and then said to someone else, "I guess there's no one home."

"Must be out for the cows or something," came the reply in a voice that nearly made them shout for joy.

"Teasdale!" both exclaimed, coming out of the cellar and running to the door. They were not mistaken. Near the creek-crossing on the flat stood a long chain of canvas-covered wagons, gleaming in the moonlight like a huge white disjointed snake. It was Teasdale's freight outfit. They lost little time in hastening to it, and after the hellos were exchanged, stood aside watching the always fascinating business of unharnessing the oxen, building the fire, cooking supper, unrolling the bedding and feeding the saddle-horses. All loneliness was forgotten.

As usual Teasdale invited them to supper, and while eating they had to answer his many questions about their being alone like that. The bull-whackers' plain and coarse food tasted ever so much better to them than did the food they cooked at home. The plates were of tin, the coffee-cups were tin, the biscuits big and heavy, the bacon half-cooked chunks, and the strong coffee sweetened with molasses. But it was a feast to Bob and Enith who sat among the men receiving all the attention.

The camp-dishes were soon washed, and more wood heaped on the fire. Pine twigs crackled noisily, sending out sweet Christmas-tree odors and ribbons of smoke dotted with stars gamboled merrily to the sky overhead and disappeared.

By the fire's light some of the men mended their clothes, some their harness, and some their shoes; others played cards. Everybody was happy and contented, and Bob and Enith forgot their scare. The men took turns at telling stories till the time to sing came. Teasdale asked Enith to choose the first song, and though "Belle Mahone" was her favorite she was too shy to say so, hoping someone else would call for it. "Root Hog or Die," was popular, and they sang that first, like this:

ROOT HOG OR DIE

I'll tell you how it is when you first go on the road;
You have an awkward team and a very heavy load.
You have to whoop and holler, if you swear it's on the sly,
You're in for it then, boys. Root hog or die.

Many the sights to be seen on the road—
The prairie so yellow and the great horned toad;
The antelope and buffalo, and the rabbit jumps so high,
And the bloody Injun, boys. Root hog or die.

Every day at noon there is something to do,
If nothing else, there's an old ox to shoe.
With a rope you throw him down, and there you make him lie,
While you tack on his shoe, boys. Root hog or die.

I suppose you'd like to know what we have to sup,
Strong black coffee out of a rusty cup.
Molasses to sweeten, or sugar on the sly,
And sow-belly for meat, boys. Root hog or die.

Times up the river I tell you can't be beat,
It was root hog or die on every wagon sheet,
The dust was in your throat, and the sun was in your eye,
It's good for them that likes it, boys. Root hog or die.

We arrived in Virginia City the twenty-eighth of June,
The people were surprised to see us there so soon.
We're all gay bull-whackers, and you bet your life we try
To straighten all with an ox-bow. Root hog or die.

But none of these evenings was complete without at least one sentimental song. So they coaxed Hank—with the freshly shaven face and curly hair—as he lay with his hands under his head looking at the moon, to sing "Belle Mahone," which he did with the proper amount of feeling, the others joining in the chorus.

It was most beautiful to Enith, and she and Bob were satisfied to go to bed when Teasdale told them it was time.

In the morning when they awoke, the freighters had pulled out, Charlie was home with the horses, and everything was lovely.

Early in the afternoon Mrs. Armand and her son Jack stopped at the house to feed their horses, and have dinner. All the children loved Mrs. Armand, whom they called Aunty Butter among themselves,

because on her first visit to the house she had asked Mother for a little rancid butter to smooth her hair. Mother offered her sweet butter, but she thought it too wasteful to use good butter that way. As soon as she learned that Mother and Father were away from home, she exchanged meaning glances with Jack, and they decided to stay with the children till their parents should return. Mrs. Armand began at once to sweep, dust, bake, mend, and put the house in order, while Jack gave his attention to the outdoor work. They had left their own ranch in charge of their half-breed manager while they were away at Helena on business.

In the evening they sat, as usual, around the buffalo-chip smudge. The buffalo-chip smudges were used to drive away the mosquitoes, though sometimes plainsmen were very glad to use them for fuel when compelled to camp far from timber. At one time the chips were the only fuel of the plains Indians who were constantly at war with the willow Indians, and when the willow Indians saw the dung fires of their enemies they were amazed and decided that a people who could burn *stones*, were in league with spirits and could never be beaten by mortals. They gave up the fight and fled.

So, everybody sat around the smudge in front of the door, telling stories, singing favorite songs, and asking riddles. Riddles were Charlie's favorites, and he had a lot on hand all the time.

Pretty soon the sound of wagon wheels started

Bob and Enith on a run up the road. But it was not Father and Mother and Bertie. It was the light rig of Sheriff Mark, who had with him a handcuffed prisoner and a deputy. The rig halted at the door so the horses could be watered, and the prisoner pushed back the big hat that had covered his face and called to Enith, "That was a fine supper you gave me, little girl, but the next time you'll have to be a little swifter. I can't afford to lose time over spilled coffee."

Enith looked at him and was surprised to recognize Blue Beard. She was scared, too, because he hinted that her slowness was the cause of his capture. She went into the house and found Bob studying the stranger from the window.

"I'm glad he's caught," said Auntie Butter as the men drove away. "We saw him skulking in the canyon yesterday, and that's why we decided to stay with you children until your parents came back."

"What was he arrested for?" Bob wanted to know.

"For killing that woman with the hood. At least, he was accused when her body was found in the Missouri. That's plain nonsense. She was the best friend Johnson ever had, and he knows it. Now that he's caught, he'll clear himself, all right."

"Then why did he flee?"

"Because the body was found by a band of loafers who had it in for Johnson ever since he threw them out of his wood-camp, and they formed a posse to

hang him right away. He was cornered and would have been killed if he had not run. It was Zanti's band."

"A few years ago he had this wood-station at the mouth of the Musselshell, near the post. The Indians of Sitting Bull's tribe were as determined to wipe out that post as they had been to wipe out Buford, and they kept up an exasperating series of attacks. Two of the Government employees had their wives with them, and one day after a long pause in hostilities the women asked permission to go for a little walk, just outside the fort where they had been cooped up so long. They promised not to go out of sight, and they didn't, but they made the mistake of crossing a coulee all full of boulders, and when they were in the bottom of it there sprang from behind every boulder and bush an Indian who fell upon them with knives; and though their screams could plainly be heard at the fort, they were both scalped and apparently dead when the white men reached them. The Indians ran away howling with triumph, and Johnson swore he'd eat the liver of their leader."

"And did both women really die?"

"No, one was dead, and the other one recovered her health, but not her hair. She's the one they say Johnson drowned."

"We saw her!" Bob excitedly exclaimed. "She came on our boat!"

"No doubt. She was well known in this part of the country—chiefly because she always wore that hood, but she never tried to make acquaintances."

They began to have an admiration for Blue Beard when they heard that he hated the Sioux Indians. They even wondered if Blue Beard would not make a fine Northern Light—for that very reason. They needed someone with nerve and experience to get them near Sitting Bull.

Bob wrote Fred and asked his advice about taking Johnson in to the band. The next coach brought Fred's answer. He thought that they had better wait about asking grown-ups. "But you must go on by yourselves. You and Enith must not lose a single chance to break away and join us. And be very, very, careful. It is so easy to spoil a chance, and the seven are almost half gone! I'm beginning to be afraid we'll waste them all on nonsense! Every time you and Enith lose a chance it will be counted half a chance because we are separated. And every time Annette and I lose a chance, it will be counted half a chance. We must certainly be together for the last two. Write me after every failure so I can check up."

On account of the chicken affair, Bob and Enith made up their minds not to ask for the big wish. They knew it would be hopeless in the face of that rooster and the empty spaces on the perch.

The returning wagon with Father, Mother, and

Bertie, could be seen for more than a mile as the road was on the level plain in that direction. Mother and Father were straining their eyes, knowing Bob and Enith would come to meet them, and they did. Both were all out of breath as they climbed into the wagon to kiss and be kissed.

Bertie was awakened out of a sound sleep and when he recognized Enith he forgot his sore arm and reached out to her, gurgling love and joy as he pressed his face to hers.

His arm was getting well very fast. Doctor Fogli had fixed it.

After supper Father went out on a tour of inspection, and his astonishment at sight of the rooster, as well as other things, was so evident that he made Bob and Enith feel how very bad they had been. Enith was fair in sharing the blame with Bob.

Mother asked Mrs. Armand to stay a little longer, but she and Jack had been away from their own ranch so long that they were eager to return. Mrs. Armand had become so fond of Enith that she persuaded Mother to let her go home with her for a visit. In a few minutes her clothes were packed and they were off. Bob wished he could go, too, but he took his medicine without whining, his last whispered words to Enith being, "Lie low and watch for Black Ducks."

She nodded, giving the Northern Light sign, and Jack started the horses homeward.

That night Bob sorrowfully wrote his Captain about the lost half-chance, for which he thought Othello more to blame than himself. Fred and Annette had already lost a half-chance of their own, which made another whole one to be regretted.



Chapter 12

TEEPEE

AT MRS. ARMAND'S Enith found a boy whose tricks were even more surprising than Bob's. They called him Teepee. He was the nephew of the half-breed manager of Armand's ranch, and about Bob's size, but older.

They soon began to tell each other boasting stories. Among other things Enith told him about the Adventurer's ride on a buffalo. "I wish I could ride like that—for a certain reason," she said.

"That's nothin'," he answered. "Anybody can ride a buffalo. You begin by riding a cow, and ——"

"Honest?"

"Of course. Didn't you ever hear of riding-cows, like riding-horses?"

Enith was ashamed to own she had not, because he had already told her several times that she was green.

"Old Carrie, over there, is the finest single-footer you ever saw. Besides, she is gentle as a sheep. Come on, try her if you want to ride buffaloes."

Enith had sat on the back of old Pet at home while she lay chewing her cud in the sunshine, so she did not hesitate to climb on to the back of Carrie, who did not seem to mind her at all. But when her

back was towards him Teepee prodded the cow with a pointed stick, and she jumped up and kicked like a frisky calf. Teepee managed to give her another dig, whereupon she lowered her head, switched her tail, and darted off over the plain.

Enith was scared and called to Teepee to make her stop, clinging to the animal's short mane with both hands. Teepee was surprised and really tried to call the cow down, but she would not let him come anywhere near her. The prods had raised her spirits, and she shook her head at Enith's soothing bossy talk, and made for the herd that was grazing about two miles away.

She grew wilder and wilder, and presently there came a vigorous jolt. Enith felt herself shoot through space and seemed to stay suspended in the air, for there was no end to her flight.

Some minutes later when she recovered consciousness she was lying flat on the ground, her heart thumping so hard she could hardly breathe. She rolled slowly over on her side, gradually remembering what had happened and soon she saw Teepee coming on a mad run, stopping short a few paces away as though afraid of finding her dead. He was biting the rim of his hat, and his face was very white.

"You—you hurt?" he asked in a whisper, all out of breath.

She did not move or answer. One of her arms was across her face so he could not see it. He came nearer, repeating the question, and finally took one



Enith flew through the air —



of her hands and tried to pull her to her feet. She felt dizzy but had no pain, and after he had brushed the grass and dirt from her clothes he took her hand again and led her towards home.

"Tell her right away—to have it over," he said. "Maybe she'll send me away this time." Enith could not walk fast. They went directly to Mrs. Armand and Teepee made his confession, assuring Mrs. Armand that he was only fooling. But Enith's pale face made Mrs. Armand scold him soundly and threaten to send him away the next time he was mean to Enith.

He listened quietly, with downcast eyes, and when dismissed left the room and, unnoticed, picked up the kitten which Mrs. Armand had given Enith, and disappeared with it for a long time.

For hours Enith searched the premises for her kitten, and when it finally appeared she could not believe it was hers. The fur on its back was cut in scallops; its legs had been shaved down to two narrow rows of fur that stood out like pantalets; its tail was beautifully roached; its whiskers curled upward; a stiff collar of paper was holding its neck-fur out like a ruff; and charcoal had changed its spots and the expression of its face so that it looked as though it were laughing.

When this strange creature trotted gaily into the room the dog rose, bristling, and began to bark at it, making it look all the funnier when it drew back, also bristling. Enith stared till she cried, for she

recognized her pet and thought it would stay like that forever. She picked it up and hastened to where Mrs. Armand was sitting knitting and dozing, and without a word set the kitten on the floor in front of her.

"Heavens! what's that!" cried Mrs. Armand, drawing her feet under the rocker. Enith's tears made her look very closely at the kitten and then she threw her hands up and sank back in convulsions of laughter. Enith was frightened. The kitten had fled under the bed at Mrs. Armand's noisy outburst, and now it came slowly forward again, coaxingly waving its ringed tail and rubbing against her dress, sending her into another fit of laughter.

Mrs. Armand told Enith that she would positively send Teepee away for this, unless Enith herself asked to let him stay. Teepee did not want to go. Mrs. Armand was awfully good to him, but he just could not help teasing when a chance to tease kept dancing before his eyes or mind. He begged Enith to ask Mrs. Armand to let him stay, promising on honor never to tease or hurt her again.

"All right," she answered after thinking it over, "I'll ask Mrs. Armand to let you stay, but first you'll have to promise me something."

"What?" He set down the pails he was supposed to be filling at the spring.

"Promise first."

"I promise," said Teepee, earnestly, knowing he

would break the promise if it did not please him. "I promise."

"On your honor?"

"Yes."

"Come behind the corral where no one will hear us." They ran to a hidden spot and Enith made Teepee give her his hand and say "Cross my heart I'll keep your secret." Then she told him about the Northern Lights, and the scheme of running away to live wild with the Indians till they could get near Sitting Bull and kill him. "We want you to join us," she ended.

At the mention of Sitting Bull, Teepee's eyes shot sparks. "Why do you want to get Sitting Bull?" he asked.

"Because he is the biggest danger in the country, and if we don't get him, he will kill all the white people in Montana. You know he hates them."

Teepee was staring straight ahead. "And I hate him," he muttered.

"Why?" Enith asked in surprise.

"Because his spies killed my father! My mother was a Sioux and because she married a white man Sitting Bull had him killed when he and his partner kept a wood-station for the boats. One day when my father's partner, Mr. Cole, came home from huntin', he heard the Indians celebratin' near his cabin. He climbed up a tree to learn what it was all about, and saw my father bound to a tree with six

arrows stickin' in his breast. Sitting Bull's devils were dancing round him, swearing to treat all white people like that till there'd be none left in the country. Mr. Cole escaped in the night."

"Was he a thinnish man with a beard and his eyes far in his head?"

"I guess so," Teepee indifferently answered, too deep in recollections to listen to her.

"But you didn't see the body with the arrows in it. Who did?"

"Nobody," he answered, a trifle unsteadily, and then pulled himself together.

Enith was shocked at the story, and remembered that the people on the boat as well accused the Adventurer of having killed Teepee's father. Soon Teepee again turned to her, his voice very firm.

"You don't have to make me swear to get Sitting Bull," he declared, his eyes like live coal in the ashes, "that's what I'm living for."

Enith was greatly surprised and pleased at this new side of Teepee's nature, and doubly pleased to feel that someone who knew all about such things as Indians and killings was going to undertake the hardest part of the job. He suddenly rose to be such a hero in her thoughts that she began to feel uncomfortable at his long silence.

"Tell me some more about the Northern Lights," said Teepee. Enith described their meetings, collections of necessary things, and so forth. Suddenly

Mrs. Armand came around the corner of the corral, red as an Indian-pink, carrying several empty pails.

"Didn't I tell you to go to the spring for water!" she angrily asked Teepee. "The butter is melting away, and it has to be ready for Mason to carry to the fort right after dinner! Take this pail," she flung one to him, "and Enith you take this little one, and hurry, hurry!"

She hastened in front of them with two pails, and they hurried all they could in the awful heat, and when they reached the house they were greeted by the calamity of calamities. The pigs had pushed open the door of the summer kitchen where the Armands churned, and were wallowing in the tub of butter! In her impatience Mrs. Armand had not closed the door securely, and because she knew it was her fault, she was all the angrier.

Two pigs were standing right in the tub, rooting and grunting happily, their snouts heaped high with the luscious yellow stuff while they talked to those standing on their hind legs trying to reach in.

Some had pulled the already molded butter to the floor where they were trying to chew it, the yellow juice running down their jaws while they skated around following the lump as it slipped in all directions rather than be caught.

When Mrs. Armand threw the door open they all squealed and made for the door. She snatched up a kettle of boiling water and chased them almost half

a mile, sometimes getting a dash on their backs, but more often getting it on her feet. At last she sat down beside the kettle and cried.

This gave Teepee and Enith a little time to straighten up. Mason and Jack Armand were still in the field, due any minute for dinner. Enith busied herself with the food that was cooking furiously in the hot kitchen, and Teepee did what he could to save the clean butter, separating it from the dirty, and mopping up the floor so Mrs. Armand would not skate. That would have been the last straw. When she finally came in, expecting to find a dinner burnt to a crisp, and the tub of butter ready to be thrown to the pigs, she was pleasantly surprised at the orderly dinner on the table, and the tidy summer-shed. But she could not join the family at dinner. Her face was purple and there was a white rim around her lips, for she had almost had a heat stroke.

In the dark cool bedroom Enith put cool bandages over her eyes and fanned her softly till she fell asleep. But she had a head-ache for three days after, and she remained so shaky after that that Enith had a chance to work like a regular housekeeper, and Teepee behaved his best.

But nothing helped. The first thing Mrs. Armand did when she was able to be up and at work again, was to send Teepee away. She was tired of threatening, and he had to have some punishment. So she lent him a pony, never smiling at him once, insisting

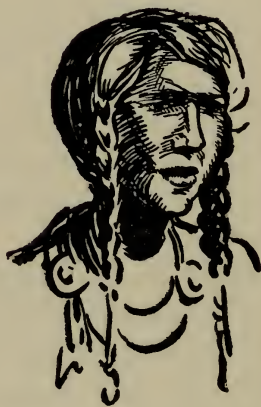
that he go right away. He had plenty of relatives who would take him in but he did not like to stay with them. Enith was heart-broken at the separation because she thought it would end Teepee's interest in the scheme. She soon went back home. While she was packing her things into her valise she found a note from Teepee pinned to one of her dresses. It said "I am going to get Sitting Bull."

It was about this time that General Sheridan recommended to our Government that an army-post be established in the Black Hills, which, right in the heart of the Sioux country, would make it a lot easier to keep these restless people in order. He sent Commander Custer to the Black Hills to explore, and Custer's glowing reports of the wealth brought a great stampede of white settlers to the place. These settlers insisted that the district be thrown open to them, if not by purchase from the Indians, then by forcible seizure.

Naturally the Sioux became greatly excited. The Black Hills region belonged to them by treaty rights, and was the jewel of their empire. They determined to fight for their rights. Everybody talked about the Black Hills, and about what the Indians would do if the white people really forced them away.

Enith told Bob all about Teepee, and that he was on the way to Sitting Bull. Therefore it was slightly disappointing when a letter from Mrs. Armand said: "Tell Enith that the bad Teepee who

teased her so much is back here. I found him in a hut with mountain fever or something, and he was so thin and sick that I brought him home to get him well. He's very restless and is thinking about something which he won't tell me."



Chapter 13

FUR TRADING

As we know, Uncle Ted was working for the big fur company. He liked the work but was all the time on the watch for a chance to become a dare-devil hunter, scout, or anything else that promised plenty of excitement. When a party of adventurers were forming for a dash to the Black Hills, Uncle Ted begged till his boss gave him leave to join these men for a certain length of time. Everybody was sure that the Government would give this land to white settlers very soon, and the first comers had the pick.

Ted was greatly excited, for, beside intending to take a claim of the greatest value, he secretly looked forward to a little fighting with the Indians. The first day out was perfect. On the second morning the party awoke to find all its horses missing. They had to walk all the way back to Benton, and the fury of the men, especially of Zanti, the half-breed leader, promised a full measure of fighting, if the thieves were caught.

After securing fresh horses at Benton, the party decided to follow the thieves and punish them before going to the Black Hills. There was no doubt that

Indians had taken the horses, and that they had gone in an opposite direction.

Zanti's men were a lawless set. Ted did not like their heavy drinking nor their boasts of what they were going to do to the thieves, but he felt well able to take care of himself. Then to his deep disappointment his boss changed his mind at the last minute and forbade him to go with men who had changed from treasure-seekers to blood-seekers. Ted grew defiant and threatened to go anyway, but other friends who knew Zanti better, also strongly advised against his going, and unwillingly he yielded, returning to his work while the rest of the party noisily continued its preparations for the biggest time of their lives, Zanti hinting that Ted was chicken-livered besides being green.

Ted set his teeth and went to an old cabin just outside the fort-enclosure where the company stored extra robes. It was Ted's job to guard these robes which had for a long time been disappearing a few at a time, and in a way that was a complete mystery. Ted slept on top of them, despite the odor, determined to find out how they got away.

The cracks between the logs where the adobe had fallen away were sufficiently large to permit air to circulate freely, and to give him a view of the bluff where some Indians were encamped.

Always he stayed awake very late, in the dark, watching, seeing nothing. And yet every morning

on awaking he immediately discovered that some of the best robes were missing from the stacks nearest the walls. He stayed up later and later, seeing and hearing nothing, and dozing off in spite of himself towards morning. On awaking with a start he could see at once just where the robes had been taken from the others. The door had positively not been opened, and the only window was solidly boarded up. He examined it thoroughly every day.

When he had companions to watch with him they did little good, being too noisy in the early hours, and sleeping through the later hours, leaving him alone as before.

Ted and his boss were at their wits' end when Ted met Jim, the half-wit, who had just arrived on the boat, and told him all about the mysterious thefts, ending by asking him to sit up with him that night and help solve the puzzle, if he could.

Jim was eager to do so, having little use for Indians, though his mother was a full-blooded Crow woman. He and Ted went to the cabin early, taking a lantern which they shaded on three sides while they played cards on the light side. That was all right for some hours; then Jim began to yawn, and Ted said good-by to this help. Jim tried bravely to keep awake, but his eyes grew smaller and smaller with every yawn, and he finally said to Ted, "You'd better lay down in that corner—yonder in the dark, you so tired. I'll just spread myself across this stack

of choice robes, and I'd like to meet the person who kin take one from under me."

Jim felt reasonably safe, as Indians did not scalp Negroes, calling their kinky wool "bad medicine."

So Ted lay down in a corner and had hardly pulled the blanket over himself before Jim was snoring loudly enough to warn all the Indians in the country of his presence. Ted now stayed awake, and it was not hard. He kept poking Jim with a stick when he grew too noisy.

Towards morning he heard stealthy steps approaching, and kept very still, not wishing to awaken Jim till he was sure it was not a stray horse or cow prowling about. He concentrated his attention, and soon heard a guarded, scraping, noise in the wall near the newly purchased robes. His eyes were well accustomed to the dark and presently he saw a long slender pole wiggling in through one of the largest cracks. It was a strong pole, and had an iron hook fastened to one end.

He watched it, fascinated, as it grew longer and longer till it reached the robes and began carefully to wind the hook in the long soft fur. Jim snored on, unaware of the enemy so near his head. Soon the pole gave a jerk, but because of Jim's weight none of the robes came away from under him. The hook came back, with more determination, rising a trifle higher and pawing about till it found a favorable spot and began to wind itself in. Jim showed signs of restlessness and scratched his head, but did

not wake up. Ted could hardly keep from laughing aloud, but did so in order to catch the thief.

Finally, when the hook was well twisted in Jim's wool, it gave a swift, hard, jerk, and Jim landed on the floor with the roar of a bull. But his wits were clear, and as Ted already held the door open, he darted out before his eyes were open and followed the shadowy form that was fleeing towards the river. As the form leaped into a rowboat Jim seized it by one leg and dragged it back to solid ground where he beat it till it cried for mercy.

Ted came running to see who the thief was, and when he recognized Zanti he was so angry that he punched him in the eye, sending him staggering backwards into the river. Jim roared with delight, and Zanti glided down-stream, like a snake, hardly making a ripple.

The Fur Company had bought those robes from Zanti that very morning, and probably bought the same ones many times over, they being especially fine, and having the trade-marks removed after each handling.

Indians sometimes reached the fort after trading hours and had to be locked up overnight. If allowed to stay free they rarely had furs left by morning because of a certain class of men, like Zanti, for instance, who got them drunk and then cheated them shamelessly. The finest robes, now worth hundreds of dollars, would be traded for a bottle of bad whisky, which the Indians craved above everything

else, not because they liked the taste, they said, but because of the feeling that came afterward.

And here, too, in spite of every care, some of the best robes would disappear in the night and the Indians who brought them would be drunk and unable to explain, though they had been locked up with the robes all night. There were no cracks. Naturally guards were often placed around the outside of the buildings, but they either went off to gamble, fell asleep, or stood in with the thieves.

Since Ted and Jim had solved the mystery of the log hut, Ted was asked to solve this, also. He had no Jim to help, the latter having returned to St. Louis with his boat. So the next time certain Indians came late and were locked up with their ware in the fort-enclosure, Ted made his bed in a corner from which he could see the entire group. He was very willing to sleep in the open air that night as a couple of skunks had been killed under the building, and had not yet wasted all their fragrance. Ted was not fond of skunks.

The other employees did not seem to mind the odor, and left the skunks right on the wood-pile. Ted wished to carry them away, but it was too late to leave the enclosure, as some of the corralled Indians were showing signs of restlessness, and would have been willing to go with him to bury the animals and then slip away to the saloons.

So Ted rolled up in his blankets and lay down inside the high wall.

Among the watched Indians this night was one well-known old character who was more eager than the others to be protected against dishonest traders. He made his bed so close to the wall that Ted became suspicious, and asked why he moved so far from the others, under the shelter. He answered that there was a heap of stink in the company's lodge.

Ted could not deny this, so he let the old fellow sleep there. He noticed, too, that another Indian slept very near the wall, a little farther down, and made up his mind to watch these two.

At about midnight when everybody was seemingly asleep, Ted detected stealthy noises outside the wall, near the two Indians. He kept very still, but opened his eyes a little and soon saw a bottle of whisky come over the wall, dangling on the end of a rope. It bobbed about till it hit the face of one of the Indians who grabbed it, looking towards Ted. After removing the bottle from the rope, the Indian took a long drink. Then he selected a valuable fur and tied it in place of the bottle, gave the rope a signalling jerk, and the robe was pulled over the wall. The Indian took another drink and settled down.

Ted was considering what he had better do when he noticed the other Indian stirring, looking towards him and then up at the wall. Another bottle of whisky came over and landed near the Indian's feet.

This fellow was all ready, having several robes at hand.

Ted sprang noiselessly to him, motioning him to keep quiet, and after untying the bottle got the two skunks and fastened them in its place. The Indian doubled up with silent delight and surreptitiously took a long draw at the bottle. Ted told him to give the signal to the man outside. He did so, jerking the rope three times, and away went the skunks sailing over the wall. They thumped hard against something, and then came a string of swear-words that would have made a bull-whacker hang his head.

The man, whoever he was, was smart enough not to linger in the neighborhood, for as soon as daylight came Ted went about smelling every suspicious character, but failed to scent out the thief.

But no more robes went over the wall.

The Indians were supposed to be free to trade with whom they pleased, but some had made contracts with the fur companies, and the companies had the right to protect themselves against the cunning of robe sharks who tempted the Indians with extra gifts, such as beads, paint, calicoes, trinkets of all kinds, and of course whisky—all preferred that, the squaws as well as the bucks.

On his visit to the family Ted said, "I may join the army, Lottie, in order to get a little excitement before the Indians disappear, like the road-agents." He wanted to prepare Mother.

"Oh, Ted, don't even say such things! Don't think them! Sitting Bull will get you first thing, you know he will!"

"He did take a pretty good look at me, didn't he," Ted laughed. "He's been laying for me ever since I serenaded him."

When Ted was not busy caring for the horses, cows, pigs, chickens, and everything else on the ranch, he would sit behind the big stove with Bob, Enith and Bertie around him, telling yarns and at the same time whittling wonderful fans out of solid pieces of wood; they had all kinds of lacy patterns, and when spread out looked just like the tails of grouse when they are angry. He made the prettiest little ones for Bertie, who immediately carried each one he received into a hidden corner to save for Mother's and Enith's Christmas presents.

Thursday's coach brought a stirring letter from Fred. He and Annette had everything ready for their get-away. "The canyon is the finest place in the world to hide in," he wrote. "We've got a lot of grub and clothes cached in a cave, and you must come up on the coach the very day this letter reaches you. There will just be time between the two coaches. Hide under the seats or in the boot while Jack and the passengers are eating, and then drop out at the head of the ravine just where the Black Grade begins. We will be waiting for you, and it will be so dark that no one will see us. This will be our fourth chance, and it must not fail."

Bob and Enith were terribly excited, and after tying up their clothes and other stuff they had collected for the scheme, they went out on the slope to watch for the stage from Benton.

The two stages passed each other at the Bell's place, Jack always a little later than Tom.





Chapter 14

MOLLY

USUALLY on coach-days Enith went down the road to meet Tom, and he greeted her with a loud flourish of the whip as he drew in the reins and stopped while some passenger helped her to the high seat beside him.

"I have a surprise for you today, Enith," he said. "Guess what it is."

"I can't guess. Where is it?"

"Strapped on behind."

It proved to be a baby antelope in a wooden cage. The children had never seen such a dainty and pretty creature. Its eyes were large and gentle, and looked at you as though saying "You may stroke my back."

Bob began at once to offer Enith all his treasures for it, but Enith shook her head at each one.

"Well, Enith," he said, pulling her aside, "it's going to be *all* ours, isn't it? Just the thing for the scheme."

"And when it grows up it will have a lot of little ones so we won't have to go out hunting when there's a blizzard!" Enith eagerly cried.

"And their hides will make our buckskin shirts, and moccasins, and lariats, and tents. She'll have a young one next year, and then every year till we have more meat and hides than we know what to do with. Maybe Uncle Ted can sell them for us. Won't Fred be surprised? Let's write him all about it right away."

And so they forgot to sneak away and hide in the coach till it was gone.

Young wild animals usually droop and die early in captivity, but this one, Molly, proved the exception. She ate obediently, slept well, and grew so rapidly that soon her cage was too small for her and she had to be taken out. At first they tied her, but as she never tried to run away they allowed her to wander about at will, examining everything, tasting everything, and following the children like a dog.

Bob taught her to jump over sticks, to lie down at command, and to play tag. She liked the games so well that she wanted to play all the time, even during work-hours. If they pushed her away, she returned the compliment by putting her head down and pushing them in turn. If Bob and Enith discouraged her too much, she gave her attention to



Bob taught her to jump over sticks



Bertie. She could bump him over so easily that he screamed at sight of her.

For Othello she had a kind of disdain, but when all the children failed her she lowered herself to play with him, and they had some wild games together. Often Othello would stop abruptly in the midst of a chase and crouch in the path so that she was obliged to jump over him, and then he always nipped her heels, making her furious, and he would fly to the protection of Bob or Enith.

Molly had the bad habit of chewing clothes and other soft things not intended for food, and Othello watched her interestedly. Soon he tried it himself, ruining gloves, hats, shoes, straps and whatever was left in his way. Molly seemed to enjoy watching him, as though she knew what was coming if he were caught.

Soon she left certain things for him, especially on wash days when she preferred to nibble the clean clothes on the lines, the woolens preferred.

Othello could not reach the clothes, so he consoled himself by going into the house and pulling the cloth from the table in the guest-room, bringing books and vases to the floor and remaining perfectly quiet under the table while the premises were being searched for him.

A few whippings cured Othello, but Molly continued to nibble clothes, even those the children were wearing if they stood still long enough. One day Bertie let out such a scream of terror that every-

body flew to him, thinking he was being killed, and they found Molly calmly sampling his curls.

After that Molly was banished from the house, but whenever the doors were left open unintentionally, she would dart in, snatch a towel or tidy, and would run away to enjoy it in private. She destroyed so much usable stuff that Mother decided to give her away.

Bob and Enith were in despair, and begged and begged, but Mother had really endured a very long time, and a limit was reached.

"Can't we take her out on the plain and picket her?" Bob asked, and Mother said they might try, though it would be cruel to picket her. As there were wild antelopes on the flat below the Bird Tail spring almost daily, Mother hoped that Molly might join them and be wild and happy for the remainder of her life.

But Bob and Enith did not want to lose her, so they picketed her near the water. The next morning they found her lying on the ground so tangled up in her rope that she could not move, and her ankles were burned by the rope. They had to cut it away, and she rose slowly, and went to drink.

Bob and Enith hoped she would stay in the neighborhood without being tied. They sat on the hillside watching her, and presently ten antelopes came down the path on the rocks to drink at the spring.

"She'll run away with them!" Enith distressedly cried, starting for Molly, but Bob held her back, for

Molly, in spite of her lameness, was already showing fight. She stood rigid regarding the antelopes curiously, and gradually the bristles on her neck began to rise. The strangers stood off, watched her with the same curiosity, seemingly afraid to come nearer. Presently Molly ducked her head and made a dash for them, and they fled pell mell to safety, Molly pursuing to a certain distance, and then coming back to Bob and Enith.

They took her home, and she behaved pretty well while her ankles were healing, but soon she began her old tricks again, and Mother objected. Many times did Bob and Enith take her far away in the gulch, hoping she would stay there, but always they found her at home before they themselves reached there.

Whenever strangers drove past the Bell home, Mother or Father would ask if they did not want a nice tame pet. But Molly's reputation up and down the road was better known than they guessed, and everybody they asked found that he could get along very well without a nice tame pet. Finally Aunt Butter came to the Bell family's aid and asked them to send Molly to her, as she had an accumulation of rubbish that ought to be eaten by something, and that she had thought some of sending East for a Billy-goat, but would give Molly a trial first.

So at the very first chance Molly was sent to her new home. With her went a note to Teepee, charging him to care for her as he would for himself, as

she was to be the starter of a big band of antelopes when they were all living wild. A lot depended on Molly.

Molly's feet, only, were tied for the journey, and she sat up in the wagon looking at the scenery as though she enjoyed the trip. Mrs. Armand wrote them that Molly had arrived safely, and had lost so little time in beginning house-cleaning, that already one hardly knew the place. Teepee, she wrote, was devoted to Molly, and Mason the man played with her as though she were a dog. She liked everybody.

Fred's next letter to Bob said, among other things, "It's lucky you and Enith didn't come up on that coach. My father grabbed Annette and me as we were getting out of the window that night, and he whipped us good and hard because we wouldn't tell what we were going to do. He's been watching us closely ever since, and our mother looks sorrowful and afraid when we're out of sight. So for the present we have to say good-by to chance number four. Darn it all!"

Chapter 15

A STRANGE FEAST

ENITH talked so much about Teepee that Bob grew quite eager to join him as soon as possible.

"I suppose we could get a good start in the right direction by going to the Mission first," he suggested.

"Yes. Teepee sometimes goes to the Mission with things for the priests from Mrs. Armand," Enith told him. "We could wait there till he comes and then all go to the canyon and take Fred and Annette with us."

Everybody loved Father Imoda, and whenever the children expressed a wish to see him they were encouraged as much as possible. Father Imoda had baptised Bob, Enith and Bertie, and given each a blessed little medal. Bertie lost his, and when Bob and Enith asked if they might go to the Mission to get another, Mother said yes.

So they rode over on Nellie, the white mare, and stayed until late, hoping the father would invite them to remain overnight. But he said he was afraid their parents would be uneasy, and for that reason they had better start homeward before dark.

Bob and Enith were disappointed, but there was no way out of it. "We'll start and pretend we're

going home," Bob whispered, "and then we'll turn towards Armand's. Mrs. Armand won't send us home, I'm sure."

"But it might take all night to go so far," Enith objected.

"That's nothing. We've got to get used to all such things."

Bob mounted Nellie and drew Enith up behind him. They waved good bye to Father Imoda and were starting away when two of the hired men came out of the barn and walked beside them, saying they would see them safely home. "The father wants us to," they explained, but said nothing more.

Bob was too angry to say anything out loud, but inside he said a lot of things. Enith knew it because she had her arms around him to keep herself from falling off. There were only five miles between the Mission and home, and the men did not mind the walk at all.

When the roof of Charlie's stable came in sight over the hill the men turned back, telling Bob and Enith not to loiter—for certain reasons.

"What do you think they meant?" Enith asked, kind of uneasily.

"I don't know. Maybe 'cause it's getting dark so fast."

"It would be too dark now to go to Armand's, don't you think so?"

They reached the top of the hill and Bob was hindered from answering by the appearance of two

Indians right in the road in front of them. Nellie snorted and pricked up her ears. Bob did not know whether to gallop past them or go on slowly, pretending he was not afraid.

The Indians looked uncommonly clean, for Indians, wearing bright new blankets and richly embroidered buckskin shirts. They grinned at Bob and Enith in a friendly way, saying something to each other in guttural whispers, and Bob urged Nellie homeward.

At the creek crossing Nellie halted abruptly, for there were three Indians kneeling near the water looking as though they were washing themselves. Bob kicked Nellie in the sides, and she bolted past them nervous and trembling. Then a few steps farther Indians began to pour from every pourable spot of the premises—the barn, the corral, the garden and the house.

By this time Bob was so scared that he kept telling Enith not to cry. Trembling, they approached the house, dreading some staggering sight; and then, joy of joys, Charlie came out, wearing an apron, and threw dishwater on the chips. He was talking to someone indoors.

After turning Nellie into the pasture, Bob and Enith ran to the house where they found Father, Mother, Charlie, and Sheriff Mark, getting supper for about thirty Indians. These were chiefs and sons of chiefs who were on the way to Washington to make treaties or have abused treaties righted,

Sheriff Mark was taking them to the boat at Fort Benton.

Bertie was already perfectly at home with them, playing with the wonderful finery that adorned their persons, and more inquisitive than they liked to have him, but they seemed to enjoy his happy laughter, and gave him presents.

The supper was a funny one. On the stove stood the clothes-boiler half full of potatoes with their skins on; two milk-pans were in the oven with corn-bread; two milk-pails were settling coffee, and bacon was stewing in a dish-pan. The shed-stove had to be used, as the regular one was not big enough alone.

Enith began to set the table as usual, and Sheriff Mark helped her. He removed all the china and substituted tin-ware as far as the supply went. He took away the forks, and first of all removed the table-cloths.

When the Indians were in their places a large pan of potatoes was started at one end of the table and sent down the line, each one helping himself, pulling off the skins, mashing the potato with a spoon or knife and covering it with molasses from a big water-pitcher. The bacon was pressed into the molasses on the plates, and the coffee was sweetened with it. They ate heartily and very loudly, scooping the last molasses up with spoons.

Among these Indians was the son of a chief who was too ill to go to Washington himself. He was an earnest and thoughtful young man of fine appear-

ance, wearing his blanket proudly, and on his head a battered stove-pipe hat. After the meal he walked away by himself, seeming to prefer to be alone. Mother was sure she had seen him before somewhere.

"Why is he so serious, and sad?" she asked Sheriff Mark.

"He has had discouraging experiences."

"What were they?"

"Why, some months ago he traveled hundreds of miles to steal the daughter of a chief and make her his wife, because his medicine had told him to. In spite of the hardships and dangers he did steal the girl and made his escape, followed by the enemy. After many delays he overtook one of the Missouri steamers just in time to evade capture. The young people stayed on the boat till the pursuers gave up the chase, and one dark night, when he thought it absolutely safe, he asked to be put ashore, and he and his bride stepped straight into the trap the girl's people had set for them by sending runners ahead."

"Now I know where I saw him," said Mother. "It was our boat that took on the young people. The Captain wanted them to go farther, but the Indian was sure that they were safe. I'm sorry he lost her after all. He seemed so brave."

"He is brave. He fought like a wild cat, single-handed, before they got the girl, but there were too many for him. So he went home, not to give up, but to prepare himself to continue the battle. When ready he boldly presented himself to the girl's father

and asked for her in marriage. The old chief was secretly pleased with his daring, but said, 'What have you ever done to deserve my daughter?' and the young man showed him the head of the biggest grizzly bear ever seen in the territory, and showed how he had killed it, alone. The chief shook his head. Then the young man brought the head and hide of a buffalo whose neck he had broken with his arms. Again the chief shook his head. Then the young man played his biggest card. He laid before the girl's father eight scalps, which he himself had taken, and the old man weakened. 'You have indeed more coups than my daughter's other suitors,' he said, 'and when you have recaptured for me the thirty ponies the Blackfeet, up north, have stolen from us, you may have my daughter—if it doesn't take too long.' The young man was on his way to get the horses when his father's illness compelled him to go to Washington. He is impatient of the delay, as some other suitor may get the horses before he has a chance."

Mother went into the house and took from her treasure-chest a black velvet sash with red roses and green leaves embroidered on the ends, and going to the Indian who was standing under the willows with Sheriff Mark, she hung it across his shoulder, giving him to understand that it was a wedding present and held her best wishes for his success in winning his bride.

Though he could not speak to Mother he seemed

deeply impressed with the gift and her words as Sheriff Mark translated them to him. He secured the sash firmly across his breast.

"You have seen this lady and her family before," Sheriff Mark told him. "On the boat. Do you remember?"

He nodded eagerly. "I recognized them at once, and my heart laughed and cried at the same time. Tell the lady that I greatly appreciate her kindness and that this scarf will strengthen the bond between us."

It was time to continue towards Benton. The children hated to see the Indians go. They were on honor and would do nothing wrong on this trip. It was not often they could enjoy the company of Indians without being afraid.

They were hardly out of sight when Bob gave Enith the sign and they ran to the meeting-place under the willows.

"Now we know what to do!" Bob joyously exclaimed. "That young Indian is our fast friend, and his father is a chief! We can escape to his band and be perfectly safe till we find a chance to join the Sioux!"

Enith clasped her hands in delight. "Goody! Goody!"

"He told Sheriff Mark that he hoped some time to do a good thing for Mother or others of her family! Think of it! He really said that!"

"What is his name?"

"I don't know. Those long Indian names are fearfully hard to remember."

"He may be a Sioux, for all we know."

"Never! He's too nice! Let's ask Mother or Father what his name is." They did so, very guardedly, but neither Mother nor Father could remember it because it was too long. And they could not even remember what tribe he belonged to.

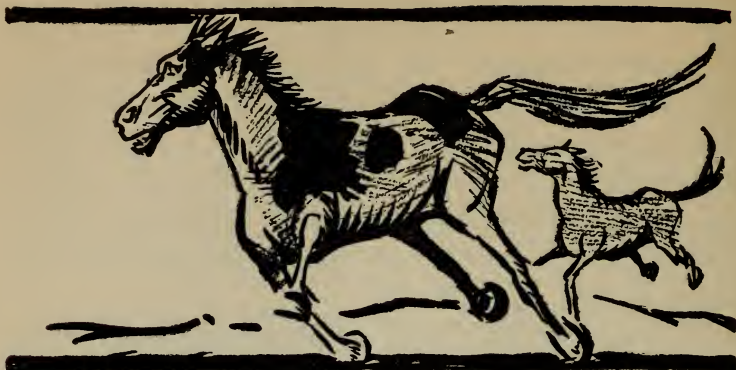
That evening's mail brought Bob a letter from Fred urging him and Enith to break away and come to them before the fall storms made the roads so hard to travel. Bob answered at once that he did not know where to get a horse. Nellie was so slow that they would not get anywhere in a year if they took her. Then he told all about the young Indian.

The return coach brought Fred's reply. He told Bob and Enith that they were pretty stupid Northern Lights not to get the name and tribe of the friendly chief's son. "Besides," he ended, "you do have other horses. Don't I know? There's that Xantippe that everybody's so afraid of. You'd better get her and break her yourself if Charlie can't. I'd do it myself in a minute if I were there. You've got to get the name of your Indian friend."

Bob did not answer this letter. He was terribly afraid to break in Tippe, as they called her, because he had never broken any kind of a horse to the saddle. He had seen it done often, of course, and was eager to try it, but he did not care to begin on a Tippe.

Soon Nellie got sick, and Bob quickly rounded up the wild horses with which Tippe was running; and when he got near home he cut her out. He had a difficult time, because Nellie was so slow. When Tippe was completely separated from the bunch, Bob put her in the field and pretended she had come home of her own accord.

Her appearance suited Father and Charlie very well, and they decided that she had been idle long enough.



Chapter 16

A XANTIPPE CURE

"SOMETHING will have to be done with that horse to break her of her bad habits," said Father, trying to saddle Xantippe at long-distance, keeping her heels in sight, and stretching his arms to the limit.

"I know a cure, all right," Charlie told him. "But it looks as though your starving plan had already broke her spirit." He stroked Tippe's neck, also with long arms, and she permitted it without a quiver. "Why, she's as gentle as a fool-hen."

"He's a fool-hen who believes it, Charlie."

"Bet I kin ride her all over the place without trouble," Charlie dared.

"I certainly won't object," Father took him up, and Charlie at once brought his own saddle. Tippe stood perfectly still while he put it on her back and carefully cinched it; but when he swung himself into the saddle, she put her nose between her front

feet, pointed at the sun with her hind legs, and Charlie went like a base-ball to its bat.

My, but wasn't he mad! He picked himself up, releasing a few bull-whacker specialties, and went at it again. The performance was repeated, and Father tried to make Charlie stop, as his nose was bleeding, and he put his hand to the back of his neck.

"Apply your cure, Charlie, and if it doesn't work, you can ride her again."

So they led Tippe into the chute where she could not move forward nor backward, and firmly tied to her tail a gunny-sack filled with hay, letting it dangle to her knees. Then they removed the bars and made her back into the corral.

She struck out on a brisk trot, and bump, bump, came the bag against her knees. She shivered and looked back, and at sight of the strange thing so near her, ran wildly around the entire circle, making the bag bump even harder. Then she gave it a good kick, sending it straight up in the air and bringing it down on her back with a thump. She reared and plunged, kicked first with one leg, then the other, then with both at once, keeping the bag so busy that it drove her frantic.

Bob, Enith, and Bertie, hated to go to the house for dinner, and when they came back to the corral she was still fighting, trying to escape from her tormentor by running swiftly, and that made the bag stand straight out behind, and whirl like a pin-wheel.

Whenever she slackened her speed the least bit, the bag came down more terrifying than ever.

They left her in the corral all night without removing the bag. In the morning she was so quiet and gentle that they cut the thing away, and she could not look at it without trembling. She certainly seemed cured.

Father thought it safe now to harness Tippe to the big wagon with staid old Ned, one of the stage-horses, and get a load of wood. Bob and Enith went along because they could help a lot. They walked up the steep grade to the mountain top to make it easier for the horses and Tippe behaved beautifully all the way up. But when the wagon was loaded high with burnt timber, and was coming down the dangerously sideling grade, Tippe plainly thought this was her chance to get even for yesterday's punishment, and she rose on her hind legs, without the least warning, and kicked furiously.

Father wound the reins around his arms and did his best to calm her, but she paid no attention to him, kicking harder, backing, and finally swinging the wagon round till two of its wheels reached the very edge of the grade. Old Ned, with might and main kept it from going over.

"Jump off behind!" Father shouted to Bob and Enith, and never before in their lives did they obey so promptly. Father's arms were nearly pulled out, and he had to leap to the ground and go to Tippe's head. She snorted and again rose on her hind legs, but Father managed to grip the reins

close to the bit, and he hung on till Tippe's forefeet came back to earth, and then he led her, step by step, and with sensible Ned's help, managed to reach the bottom of the coulee right side up.

It looked as though Tippe were tired out, but after breathing hard a while, she took a fresh start and acted worse than ever. Father unharnessed Ned, and Tippe tried to run away with the wagon, jerking it sideways and entangling herself in the harness till she threw herself, and became helpless. Father crawled carefully near and cut the straps that held her, lest she break a leg or kill herself. She sprang up, pulling and fussing; but Father managed to tie her securely to one of the hind wheels. Then he put Bob and Enith on Ned's back and they started home.

Tippe was furious, she called and pawed and pulled at the rope, but they paid no attention. Father had assured himself that she was unhurt, and that there was nothing near with which she could injure herself, so she had to remain there all night without food or water. She kept calling after them, as though promising to be good, but they would not believe her again.

The next morning Charlie went with Father to bring Tippe and the wagon home. Of course Bob and Enith went, too. They had to learn all they could about handling this horse which was to carry them to liberty and independence.

Tippe was standing on the very spot where they had left her, and showed little interest in the com-

ing party. Her head was hanging low and she was shivering. On rounding the wagon where they could see her better, they were amazed to see her head about twice as big as it ought to be.

She had been bitten on the nose by a rattler. Though the bite was fresh, there was no snake in sight. Charlie had brought two of his horses to haul the wagon home. They tied Tippe behind it and drove home as fast as possible.

Charlie had doctored snake-bitten animals before, so he took charge of Tippe. He had to work hard, but he saved her. She was sick a long time, living in a box-stall all by herself, the sore on her nose making her frantic with its itching when it began to heal.

Bob and Enith decided that it would take some time before they could trust themselves with Tippe for such a long trip as it was to Fred and Annette's home.

Fred reproachfully wrote to Bob, "Don't you know that Sitting Bull is holding councils again! He's calling all the Indians he can get to listen to him, even other tribes, and their talk is only about driving white people from the West. They will kill all they can."

An animated correspondence between the members of the Northern Lights was carried on, the letters being carried secretly by the ever obliging Tom, who had that district for his stage route.

Chapter 17

WINTER COMES

WINTER came timidly, in the night. Bob and Enith awoke one morning to find the plain white and still. Not even a blade of grass marked the great expanse, level as the sea and calmer.

Soon more flakes began to fall, gently, frolicking like children released from school. In the city Bob and Enith used to watch the flakes which, instead of attracting attention to their wonderfully beautiful forms, were crushed into the muddy slush by hurrying feet.

The next night the mercury went way, way down. Father had to shovel a path to the creek in the morning to get water by cutting a hole in the ice. A great flock of snow-birds came from out of space and cradled themselves to earth right in front of the house. Bob set snares for them but he could not stay out more than two minutes, it was so cold. He caught two, but fearing the cats would get them in the night, let them go before he went to bed.

There was no travel whatever on the road. No freight outfits, no private parties, not even Indians; and the stage-coach could not make its regular trips.

In the evening the wind went down and the telegraph wires began their cold-song, warning every-

body to stay close to the fire. The nails or boards in different parts of the house popped like pistol shots. Bob and Enith sat on the buffalo-robe before the fire. Bertie was asleep several hours. Father had to sit up to keep the fires going, and Mother sat up with him.

It was almost morning when Father heard the cries of snow crushed under wheels and he hastened to the window and thawed a peep-hole. A conveyance of some kind was slowly drawing up to Charlie's door and then remained so motionless that it might have been a phantom rig. It consisted of two wheels, and between them sat a fur-muffled figure not moving a bit but holding the reins. The horses's heads hung way down, and they were coated white with frost.

The man was Tom, and with him as much of the stage as he could pilot over the road in blizzard-time.

Father wrapped up and hastened to Charlie's stable and pounded on the door. "I'm afraid we have a frozen man here, Charlie! Come, quick!"

Charlie's fire was out, so he and Father lifted Tom from the seat and half led, half dragged him to the house where the two fires seemed the only cheerful things in the world.

Tom was encrusted in ice and could not move. His face was frost-bitten, his hands numb and helpless, and his lashes frozen together so he could not see.

His fur coat had to be broken from him in pieces,

and then Father and Charlie rubbed his face, hands, and feet with snow till the circulation was started, Charlie ran out to take care of the horses while Father greased the worst spots. By this time Tom was able to help a little with the thawing out, and the first thing he did after removing the icicles from his brows and mustache was to laugh.

"A fine condition for an old stager," he said, working his wooden fingers over the stove. "There was a regular chinook on the other side when I started out or I should never have got so soaked. On top of the divide I caught it though! Without a hoot of warning, either! I just had to let the horses have their heads."

Here the blizzard seemed to get its second wind and it tore at the house as though determined to root it from the earth and carry it off. Charlie came blowing in on an extra hard gust. He said the horses could not eat yet, but thought they would be all right in a day or two.

After half an hour's stamping, walking, rubbing, and so forth, Tom seemed as well as ever, only that his face was red and swollen. Mother had a hot meal ready, but Tom could not eat heartily.

When he was through he asked, "Are the fresh horses ready?"

"Why, Tom!" Mother cried. "You're not going to start out again?"

He smiled, rising and getting his belongings to-

gether. "Indeed I am. Blizzards are my natural food. Besides, Jack started out from the opposite end two days ago, and was to have met me here. I'm afraid something's wrong. And my bag of mail must reach the fort soon. I'm all right now. Charlie you'll have to lend me your fur coat and gloves. I'll return them in less than a week."

All arguments were in vain. Tom continued to laugh and to wrap himself up.

"It's a wonder you had room for the mail-bag," said Mother while warming his gloves over the stove, and he glanced at the bedroom door as he leaned towards her and whispered that he had other things beside the mail-bag, and that he would leave them with Charlie. "That was one of my chief reasons for pushing through at this particular time," he ended. Then he bade them good-bye as cheerfully as though he were starting on a pleasure-trip in mid-summer, while the chances of getting through were much against him.

The stage relay-stations were from twenty to twenty-five miles apart, and the blizzard was devouring the road and every other landmark. But Tom had already passed through two full sized blizzards without serious damage to himself, so he believed himself equal to anything the *coldmaker* could scare up. Besides, the horses' instinct rarely failed.

"Gosh, Tom's the bravest man I ever heard of!"

whispered Bob close to a crack where he had been listening with all his might. "Just hear how those wheels are making the snow squeal!"

"You bet he is brave," Enith sleepily answered. "Won't he have a lot to tell us when we're ready to live wild? I just hate blizzards, don't you?"

Chapter 18

SANTA'S COUSINS

THE Christmas presents were all ready. But for Uncle Robert's family to come was entirely out of the question.

The worst disappointment of years was the fact that there could be no Christmas tree,—for the first time in their lives. If Father or Charlie had gone only the one mile to Dry Gulch for a little pine or fir, they might have been frozen to death, as it was fifty degrees below zero, and the wind was blowing.

It promised to be a forlorn holiday when Mother made a delightful suggestion, namely, that the usual Christmas arrangements be reversed, she and Father going into the living-room for the evening while the children got the Christmas ready.

"You may use anything you want, in the whole house," she said, "and Father and I will promise not even to peek."

This would be fun indeed, and Bob and Enith were consoled. As soon as the supper dishes were washed, Father and Mother went into the living-room and closed the door tightly. Bertie, of course, had to help with the Christmas.

"Well," said Enith, as soon as they were alone, "the first thing will be to find something that we

can decorate like a tree." They often played Christmas, using the broom upside down, but this would not do on the real day. They had to have something better.

"Maybe I could get the little willow down by the foot-bridge," Bob suggested, and Enith thought that would be fine. True, it had no leaves, but it had ever so many branches and twigs for things to hang from. So Bob wrapped himself in heavy clothes and ran down to the creek with the hatchet. In ten minutes he came back without the tree. The tears were frozen on his face and he stamped and fussed till Enith warned him that Father and Mother would hear him.

"I don't care if they do!" He loudly retorted, for the pain in his fingers was awful. He put them under his arms and stamped and sniffled more till Enith was wild with fear.

"You'd be a good one to live wild in the winter time," she taunted.

"Shut up! When we live wild we won't have to go out for a tree when it's fifty below zero, will we?"

Bertie sneezed and Father pulled the door partly open and asked why in the world the outer door had to be opened, making all the house cold.

Of course they could not tell him, and when he forbade their going out again, they did not know what to do. There would be no fun at all without

a tree. Even Bob could see that, when he was thawed out.

As usual, Charlie came to the rescue. He came in through the shed and they confided their trouble to him. He took the hatchet and in a few minutes brought the tree into the house. Then he went into the living-room with Mother and Father.

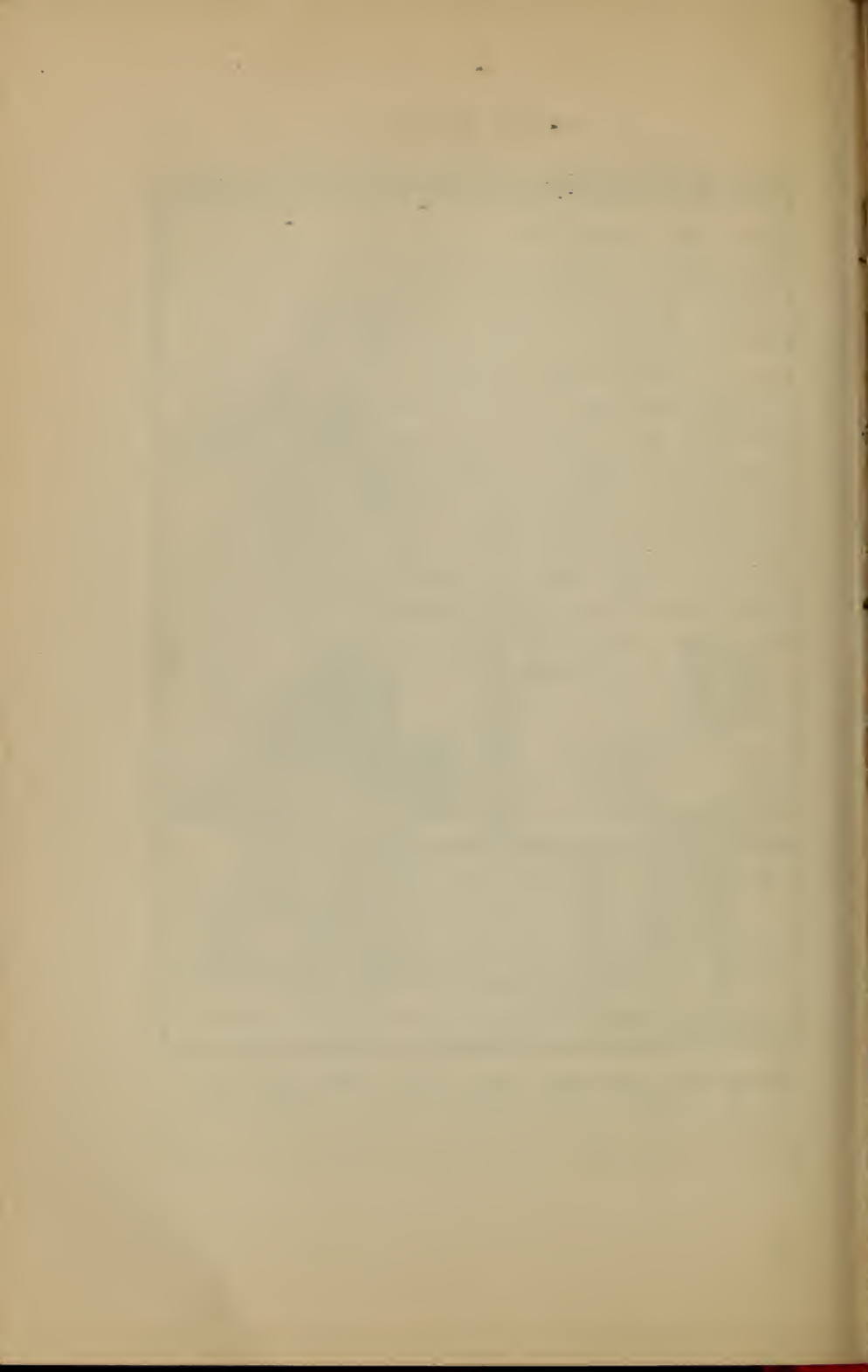
Bob's fingers were still numb, but he managed to cut a hole in a soap-box, turned it upside down, forced the end of the tree into it, then lifted the whole thing to the dining-table where it leaned against the wall for support. The loud scraping noise against the wall woke the kittens, and they sprang up spitting and bristling, but soon became much interested. They sat side by side, watching the tree, their heads and eyes following the motion of the branches.

Enith brought from her room a string of pretty pine cones, and Bob hung them singly to the branches with bits of bright red and green worsted. When this was done they got the red soap-wrappers, saved all the year for this purpose, and cut lace-paper baskets, which, with a prune or some other weight in the bottom, hung beautifully straight, and were very decorative. The tree already looked perfectly lovely. To keep Bertie quiet they let him cut baskets out of pieces of wrapping paper.

Then they went to the kitchen where Bob made a good fire while Enith got together all the different things needed to make cookies—flour, sugar, butter, milk, raisins, and spices. She gave Bertie a



Bob forced the tree into the box —



piece of dough to keep him from bothering while she rolled the rest thin in a big sheet and then she and Bob cut out houses, horses, cows, men, chickens, dogs, women, and everything else that could be made from cookie-dough. For the eyes they used currants and pepper-corns, rice for the teeth, and the whole cloves for daggers and Bowie-knives.

They arranged the different things carefully in the bread-pans and slipped them into the hot oven, proud, of their artistic effect. But when they came out of the oven they were all alike! Neither Enith nor Bob could tell the difference between a Vigilante and a fir tree. They could only guess which was a house and which a horse from their places in the pan. Bob got his knife and water-colors and after trimming and touching them up with color, they looked a lot better, and left a heap of delicious crumbs to be eaten.

Bertie's dough soon lost color, but he insisted on baking the pieces he called chickens, and when they came out of the oven in gray wads, he ate them and enjoyed them immensely. Then he grew tired, yawning and rubbing his nose on the back of his hand. When he began to sneeze again, Mother opened the door a wee bit and coaxed him into the living-room.

That made the work much easier. But the candles were hard to manage. They insisted on hanging head down, refusing to be balanced on a hot pin, being pieces of large candles and rather too

heavy for such frail holders. The kittens got stepped on often but they remained in the room, their dancing eyes following the dangling tree-decorations while quivers of expectation rolled down their backs.

It was past midnight when the last Bandit was hung, and Bob and Enith stood gazing at the tree in wordless admiration. The fire had gone out and they were shivering. Enith brushed up the floor while Bob straightened the furniture, and then they scampered off to bed agreeing to be up at daybreak to ring the Christmas bell. Both went right to sleep.

After what seemed about five minutes in dream-land Enith was startled awake by a loud crash in the dining-room, and immediately after it the kittens came flying and hid under her bed. She sat up and listened. All was still. She wrapped a blanket around herself, lighted her candle, and went to investigate.

Such a sight as greeted her! The tree, the beautifully trimmed tree over which they had labored six hours, lay on the floor in a helpless sprawl, while houses, men, animals, candles, and everything else with which they had taken such great pains, were mingling their colors and remains in bewildering confusion.

Enith stood speechless till Bob appeared, half dressed and shivering. He gave the scene one look, and muttering a deeply disgusted "Gosh," returned to his room and slammed the door. Enith dropped

to the floor and cried. The kittens came slowly forward and rubbed against her, as though trying to tell her that they were sorry, and that they had no idea the tree would come down so easily when they played with one or two of the dangling things. She pushed them aside and went to her room heart-broken, and also closed the door with a bang.

Just at daylight a little silvery bell tinkled outdoors, like on every other Christmas morning, and Bob and Enith sat up, holding their breath and thinking they must still be dreaming. But it sounded again, nearer, and they slapped on their clothes and ran to the dining-room.

The sight that now greeted them made them think more than ever that they were dreaming. The tree was standing up straight, with all its candles erect and burning brightly. The trimmings were in good order, and there was no mass of broken cookies on the floor. Heaped around the bottom of the tree were many mysterious looking packages which had not been seen before.

For Bob there was a gun of wood that would shoot sticks to a great distance, and with force, too. Bertie received a box of animals that looked like buffaloes, and he let Bob shoot at them. For Enith there was a lovely large wax doll, dressed like a baby, and able to close its eyes when laid on its back. There were many other things, in packages from Uncle Robert's family, and there was no end of surprises and wondering and happiness.

Mother and Father and Charlie praised the tree, and Mother cooked the coffee and baked the coffee-cake she had set to raise the night before. It had a lot of sugar and cinnamon on top, and everybody was happy.

Tom had brought the Christmas package through the blizzard from Uncle Robert's place, taking better care of it than of the mail. That was what he had whispered about to Mother. For Enith Tom left a present for which she had wished ever since the last Christmas. It was a round black comb shaped like a horse-shoe, with teeth at the ends, only, and in the middle an ornament of cut-out work with a pink ribbon run through.

Enith did not dream that Tom could bring her anything in such a hard storm, and she was doubly glad now that she had asked Mother to give him the green wristers which she had crocheted for him, and the woolen muffler made from a flannel petticoat and looking quite smart with an edge of green stitching. She had made Tom's and Charlie's presents just alike, and they acted greatly pleased, putting the things on right away.

It was a record winter. The mercury had gone down to fifty-seven degrees below zero. Snow lay on the ground a long time, and cattle suffered a lot, for the ever looked-for chinook, even, stayed on the yon side of the mountains.

It was Tom who brought the first letter since Christmas from Uncle Robert's family. They were

all well and Uncle Robert said he would see them all as soon as the roads were passable, as he had to go to Benton on business. He asked if he might take Bob and Enith back with him on his return, as he thought the children all needed a change, and a visit with each other.

Bob and Enith were greatly excited over the expected trip, and talked nothing but scheme when they were alone. When they were naughty, which they really were, and often, too, Mother threatened not to let them go, and that made them good, for a while. It was hard to be good when winter shut them in again, and there was nobody to tease but each other.

Chapter 19

FROLIC TIME

ONE morning, without any fuss at all, the sun suddenly took its broadest smile out of the winter-chest and flooded the plain with light, warmth, birds, flowers, and the smell of budding willows.

Mother opened wide the house, the cellar, the barn, the hen-house, the pig-sty, and everything else she could, to let the spring enter. The animals frisked till they were tired, then got down close to the earth, wallowing, rolling, burrowing, scratching, covering themselves with warm sand and then shaking it off.

Bob and Enith rode to the foothills and found the purple crocus already coming out of its silken gray hood, and shy fritillarias, still tinged with green, shivering beside streams of melting snow in the coulees. For days and days the world was under the magic wand of spring. Sand-roses were born white and died pink in a day. Shooting-stars ran in great herds up the slopes from the creek. Everywhere meadow-larks sang, laughed, and teased. Their first call in the early morning usually was: "Neighbor! Neighbor! Geebutyourlate!" If Bob and Enith did not rise immediately after that call, it was made more emphatic and a bit indignant: "Neighbor! Your *house* is on fire!" More often they said, "Say,

Neighbor! Let *me* fix it for you!" And occasionally, "Say, neighbor, didyoueverseehimsob?" They still say these things, and more, but one has to listen for them.

Beside bringing all the outdoor joys, the spring brought the hated house-cleaning. Bob and Enith knew they could never escape that and they wished it over.

"Everything looks just the same after as before," Enith pouted at the first signs.

"No sir-e-e-!" Bob retorted. "Mother looks a lot brighter—after."

That night Bob, Enith, and Bertie, were sent to bed extra early that Father and Mother might be undisturbed while white-washing the summer-kitchen. A short time after retiring Enith remembered that she had left her doll in Bertie's reach. She got up to hide it, and her foot went plump into a pool of cold water.

She cried out with the surprise of it and Mother came to see what the trouble was. A stream of water was coming from under the living-room door, and when Mother opened it she found a perfect lake in the room. Some of the furniture was beginning to float about. The creek had overflowed and entered the house while everybody was busy. Father opened the outer door to investigate, and a regular river rushed in, bringing chips, grass, and other things.

"The chickens!" he cried, running for the lantern

while Mother got his high rubber boots. The chicken-house was half under ground, and a lot of hens were setting. Mother also put on boots and then called Charlie to help. His stable was on higher ground, so he had not discovered the flood.

As soon as the door closed on Mother, Enith got up and stalked about in the water, shrieking because it was so cold.

"What's the matter?" Bob called.

"Come and see," she cried, and in a minute he joined her in the dining-room where they splashed about, wetting the newly whitened walls, shouting and shivering, waking Bertie, who also came in.

"Let's play the chairs are boats," Bob suggested, getting a dishtowel and tying it to the broom for a sail. The chairs were floating. Enith lifted Bertie to the table, giving him a string with bent pin to catch fish. Then she jumped on to the table declaring, "I'm Columbus, discovering America! You and Bertie are Indians and must dance for me." They danced the water white and foamy till they heard Father coming, and slipped into bed, closing their eyes; but he was not fooled. He had his arms full of half-drowned chickens, and Mother and Charlie soon followed, also with wet chickens which they deposited on chair-backs, shelves, foot-boards, and wherever there was a perch. Then they went for more.

"Don't you let me catch you outside of the bedrooms again tonight," said Father on going out, and

though they were surprised they answered with firmness, "We won't."

The hen-house was filled with water to the ground level, and the chickens had tried desperately to save themselves. Some were drowned. But the ducks and geese were having a picnic, swimming about unconcernedly, waiting for the water to rise to the window and then gliding into the flood which was bringing them many choice morsels, not on their daily bill of fare.

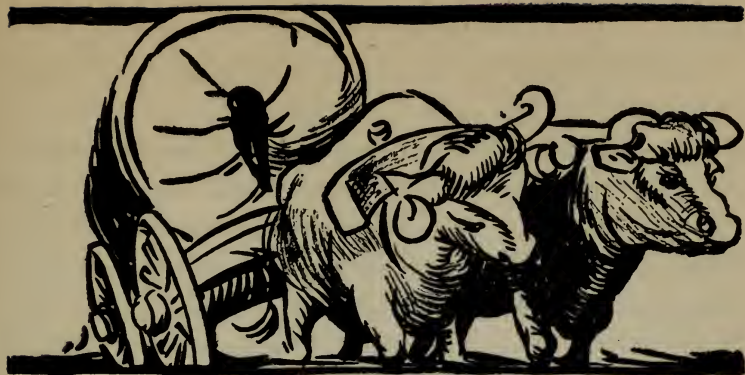
Eggs were floating away as though made of thisle-down, both wild ducks' eggs from the bushes, and the spoiled eggs from the setting hens' nests.

In two days the water disappeared, leaving mud, grass, sticks and other things where they were not appreciated, and completely destroying the little vegetable garden.

The pigs, geese, and ducks, were a sorry sight. But they were happy. And the overflow on receding left fairy-land in its wake—acres and acres of yellow bean blossoms that created a light as from the sun and perfumed all outdoors; blazing-stars that draped the knoll-sides like crimson rugs; and blue forget-me-nots hugging the earth.

But when Uncle Robert came and wanted to take Bob and Enith home with him, Enith was sick in bed with a fever that had followed the very hard cold she took during that wet night in the flood. And the flood had taken away all the vegetable garden so Bob could not be spared and had to make

the new garden almost by himself. It was hard, but there was no help for it. The Northern Lights consoled one another by writing long letters all of which agreed that life at home was growing to be positive slavery, and that they must make a change very soon.



Chapter 20

TOGETHER AGAIN

AND now came the chance to move near Uncle Robert. Doctor Fogli was going to Helena to get ready for his return to Italy, and offered Father his place.

Bob and Enith were wild with delight. They could see their cousins every day, and their secret plans could progress more rapidly.

So the Bells moved up in the Doctor's mysterious house. It was located in an open space just large enough for a little ranch, where Wolf Creek emptied into the Prickly Pear Creek. It was in a beautiful part of the canyon, and very different from the place they left.

The house soon lost its mystery, its smells, and its gloom. The skins, musk, minerals, and so forth, that the Doctor left behind, were thrown away, and

a window and door were cut in the dark portion of the house.

The same creek ran past Uncle Robert's place, but there the canyon widened out and ended in land flat enough to farm. The streams were filled with trout, and suckers. In the canyon grew wild cherries, gooseberries, currants and raspberries. The walls of the canyon rose high towards the sky, and bear tracks around the berry patches were so common that the children lost their dread of being surprised until some slight noise in the brush would scare them. The two miles between the families were Paradise. Their one heart-ache was leaving Charlie, Othello, and the cats.

In Chicago, Bob and Enith used to fish in the puddles with bent pins for hooks. But this was real fishing, and it was wonderful. At the Bird Tail there were no fish at all. So this was their first sport of that kind. The real hooks were baited with grass-hoppers, and the fish snapped them up quickly. They could catch more in a day than the family could use.

When Fred and Annette came to visit, the four would take a lunch and spend the entire day in the canyon, promising Mother to yodel at times that she might know wild animals had not eaten them. When tired of planning they climbed the steep canyon walls and got gum from the trees. The pitch oozing out of fire-charred trees was the best, having lost its bitterness and its stickiness. They soon

learned to know the different kinds at sight. Not, however, till they had had their teeth all gummed with pitch that made the food taste bitter for more than a day.

Sometimes Fred and Bob had to go with Uncle Robert to help destroy the beaver-dam which flooded the vegetable garden. No matter how thoroughly the dam was destroyed, the next day found it all repaired again looking stronger than ever. When beavers settle down on a certain spot it is almost impossible to drive them away. The odor of gnawed bark and beaver-musk was everywhere, and the children liked it.

When the beavers became too much of a nuisance, traps had to be set for them, and Fred and Bob had charge of the work. They were proud of this, and had several traps given them for their very own which they set along the stream, baiting them with beaver-musk on a stick. The skins were valuable, but it was so far to the traders that they could not be taken there a few at a time, and many were wasted. Also muskrat skins.

The tails of the beavers were not wasted. Mother and Aunt Lena prepared them for the table—sometimes like pickled pigs' feet, sometimes like broiled meat, but most often like jellied fish, with cloves and bayleaves for flavoring. They tasted good when one did not look at them. They were gray, flat, and hairless.

Every morning except Saturday and Sunday,

Fred and Annette came over on Maggie for two hours of study, after which the four were allowed to play. There were few school-books, so Father made up the lessons.

At Uncle Robert's place where the river curved around the corral was the deepest fish-hole of the neighborhood. The water eddied like a whirlpool, and this was Fred's favorite refuge. Sometimes he would ride his horse right into it, making the animal swim while he performed on its back, standing on one foot, turning around, trying to stand on his head.

Beside this pool grew the largest and finest cottonwood tree of the ranch. It stood at the head of a perfect jungle of rose and gooseberry thorns, strangling clematis vines, and other scratchy shrubs which kept the men and animals from entering it, and the Northern Lights felt safe from listeners when they held their meetings under the tree. From the high branches they could locate the horses and cows, and do other reconnoitering.

And here they held all their business meetings for the scheme. They had learned how to raise potatoes, corn, peas, beans, rutabagas, and wheat and oats. The boys were building a plow. Every day some new article had to be added to their stock, Fred scolding when they failed to do so. One day the girls discovered an old bed-lounge which Aunt Lena had discarded because the springs were broken, and the Northern Lights were greatly excited over the

find. They dragged it into the brush and began the repairs at once. Fred said the girls were doing better than Bob, and gave him to understand that this would not do at all; so Bob worked hard, collecting old shoes and repairing them according to Heel-and-Toe Smith's instructions. The useless ones he cut into strips for door-hinges and sling-shots. But this was not enough. He prowled and prowled, determined to outshine the girls, and finally came upon a mouldy mattress which had been thrown into the brush by a former stock-tender, and this lifted them all to the seventh heaven of joy.

In a few weeks they had a collection of stuff that would have gladdened the heart of any Indian. Moth-eaten clothes, rusty and bent nails, battered and leaky tin-ware, torn blankets, a legless chair, broken knives, forks with twisted tines, the old shoes, mattress, and lounge. When a company of freighters left an old sheet-iron stove that had lost its bottom, there was nothing more to wish for.

The small potatoes that had been left in the field were gathered into a sack. The wild hen that lived in the berry-patch behind the field, as well as her brood, were to be snared and taken along. Matches, the gun, ax, horse, cow, cat, and pig, were to be left till the last moment.

They would shoot big game, dress in furs, eat fish, and have a perfectly lovely time always,—after the important thing had been done.

Thus the happiest hours were spent under that

tree. Especially happy were those evening hours when Mother was visiting, and she and Aunt Lena would offer to wash the supper dishes, and mind Baby Rose and Bertie as well.

Seated in a circle on the soft ground under the tree Fred would call the roll, and each would report what he or she had done for the "scheme" that day. If it was a good report, there would be praise from the Captain. If an unsatisfactory report, there would be reproaches and orders to do better next day. After business came games of hide-and-seek, tag, Vigilante or Road-agent. And always the evening ended with a story, the same old stories told over and over, the scarey ones being favored.

Heel-and-Toe Smith, who had once been a dancing teacher, was a fine story-teller, and they never tired of listening to him. He was a quiet, forlorn kind of a fellow, living all by himself in a lonely little shack not far from Uncle Robert's place, and, like Doctor Fogli, having no garden, no cattle, no chickens nor anything else that ranchers need. Fogli at least had a fine horse and dog. In his modest way Smith smiled all the time, trying to keep his mouth closed because his teeth on both sides were missing. And rarely, be it spring, summer, fall, or winter, was he seen without a long blue army coat with cape. His favorite dance was the Heel-and-Toe polka.

Chapter 21

TEMPORARY NEIGHBORS

"WE'LL just have to have some system in this business," Fred declared at the next Northern Lights meeting, "by establishing a chain of agencies. When we're ready to take Sitting Bull, we'll dispatch a runner to the first agent, he'll send word to the next, and so on till they are all ready to start out at the same time to rescue us."

"Why can't we send word to the fort, when we're ready?"

"Because the Indians are watching the forts all the time. But they would never suspect that we are clever enough to have agents everywhere. If we could only get into an Indian camp soon and learn their secrets! The real things are very different from the stuff we talk about all the time."

"Where could we find agents that we can trust?" Annette asked.

"Well, first, there's Teasdale ——"

"Teasdale disappeared on his last trip to Helena. He had lots of money and no one knows what's become of him."

"I forgot that. Second, there's Tom. He'd risk his life for us, like he did to bring the Christmas package through the blizzard. Besides, he has six

horses at his command all the time, and a coach, if we should need it. Third, Doctor Fogli. If we invite him into our band he'll give up going to Italy. And we do need a doctor. Fourth, Bill Fairweather, because he can charm snakes and Indians so they can't hurt a fellow. Fifth, your young Indian. Sixth, Nigger Jim, because he is so strong. Seventh, Liver-eating-Johnson because he'd rather kill Sioux than eat. And last, but not least, Teepee—if he can be found."

"Bill Fairweather is reported dead," said Enith, studying the list.

"That wouldn't make so much difference now," Fred thoughtfully observed. "I'm learning to handle snakes almost as well as he could. I'm going to begin with rattlers soon."

The belated Bob and Enith hastening home from the meeting, found, as though in answer to their prayer, a band of friendly Blackfoot Indians pitching camp right on their favorite playground, a few rods from the house. Bob turned and ran all the way back to Uncle Robert's.

"Fred! Fred!" he panted, appearing in the corral where Fred was milking. "Indians! Friendly Indians, camping right at our house! The best chance we could ever hope for! You've got to come right over!"

Fred was so excited that he got more milk on his shoes than in the pail, and after the job was finished

he asked his father if he might go home with Bob to see the Indian camp.

"After our experience with Annette? I should say not!"

"But Father, these are ——"

"Not another word! You keep away from all Indians. They are too treacherous." No amount of arguing or pleading helped. Fred begged Bob to stay with him all night, but Bob was too eager to return to the Indians. And, to deepen Fred's disappointment and hurt, Heel-and-Toe Smith went back with Bob.

In the meantime Enith and Bertie stood watching the Indians, some of whom were unpacking their baggage while others still filed slowly past the house, their travois scraping up the dust, their bulging bags on both sides of their sad cayuses hinting at all kinds of mysteries, dogs dragging babies on travois and looking neither to right or left.

The Indians pitched their tepees as far as possible from the telegraph poles, which they called whispering spirits that give white men information about the Indians.

Bob, Enith, and Bertie, took in everything; Bob making notes in his little book till one of the Indian boys motioned him to go along fishing. Bob was delighted, and from this boy he learned right away how to catch fish when you have neither hook or line. The boy, named Longtooth, made a slip-noose of horse-hair, and lying flat on his stomach at the edge of the

stream, lowered his noose into the water and watched, keeping himself just out of sight of the fishes, and remaining as immovable as a rock.

When it seemed to Bob that Longtooth must be asleep, he flipped a fine trout at Bob's feet. He had let several small ones go by. Then he gave Bob a noose, and they lay a few feet apart having a wordless visit. Bob liked it. Before long he, too, landed a trout, and soon they had enough for supper, and went back to the camp.

Enith and Bertie were watching the squaws doing their unpacking and getting their suppers ready. Each family cooked for itself. One woman took several handfuls of dried cherries from a sack, spread them on a flat rock, and ground them to a paste with another rock, without first having removed the stones, which, of course, would have been nearly impossible. When the cherries were fine enough she put them into a pot with other things which Enith could not recognize, half-filled the pot with water, and hung it over the fire. Soon it began to steam and send out a delicious odor, but Enith refused to taste it when the squaw offered her some.

She moved away to where another family was making soup from some gray sticky stuff which looked for all the world like a lot of dried grasshoppers stuck together. Maybe it was. Here, too, some was offered her, and she refused. Then she became frightened, remembering that Indians some-



Longtooth lowered his noose into the water



times become offended when one refuses to eat with them.

She took Bertie more firmly by the hand and walked over to where Bob and Longtooth were giving their fish to the oldest woman in the camp. This squaw lived alone, and prepared her food in the manner of long ago, before Indians had dishes of any kind. For a soup-kettle she used a water-tight bag made from hide, which she half-filled with water, chopped the trout into chunks, and tossed them into the water without first removing the entrails. Enith could hardly believe her eyes. Then the squaw raked from the coals some rocks that had been heating and dropped them into the bag with the fish. The steam rose, the water soon bubbled, and the fish were cooked.

Longtooth explained that the old woman could not possibly eat food cooked by the squaws of to-day, and that this was an especial feast for Bob and Enith, whom she loved. The two looked at each other with a nauseated expression, preferring not to be loved; and when she threw aside her head covering they recognized the long gray locks, the wrinkled face, and keen eyes of the witch-woman who had visited them that night at the Bird Tail.

"The whispering-spirits told me I'd see you again," she said, in gestures.

What to do they did not know. Fred had repeatedly told them that if you refuse to eat with

an Indian he gets angry, but does not show it till he finds a chance to hurt you. The old woman grinned cordially while offering each a dish of fish-stew, and they took it in unsteady hands, looking longingly after Longtooth who was going to his own supper.

The woman bent over Bertie, smoothing his golden locks and murmuring endearments while smiling at him. Bertie returned the smile, but pulled back on Enith's hand and placed one hand over his face, plainly disliking the woman's looks. Bob and Enith were distressed to death. They set their feast on the ground and hastened away with Bertie, hearing the woman's shrill laugh. In passing the main chief's tent Bertie stumbled over something, giving the tent a hard jerk.

Chief Peo came out at once, and on seeing who it was, he, too, laughed and playfully shook his finger at Bertie. He was all dressed up in his best clothes, maybe intending to visit the Bells. His buckskin shirt was almost covered with designs in porcupine quills and beads; a heavy necklace of bears' claws hung around his neck. It was a badge of bravery, and the only bravery they had heard of was that he beat his wife.

The chiefs never seemed to do any work, and that may be one of the reasons why the young men of the tribes are so eager to become chiefs. These sat around talking and smoking, and giving orders to

the women and younger men, sometimes by merely placing a certain object on a certain spot.

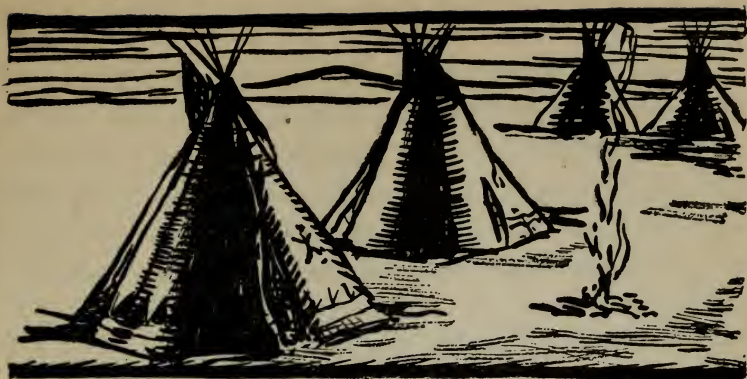
After supper Smith took Bob and Enith back to the camp, though they had not entirely recovered from their uneasiness. They found Chief Peo seated in front of his tepee with a lot of children gathered about him, telling stories. He and Smith were old friends. He greeted Smith cordially, inviting all three to be seated and listen to his tales, if they cared to.

"You remember some of my stories, don't you?" he asked Smith, in a language Bob and Enith could not understand, and he urged Smith to select a story he used to like, years ago. So Smith asked for the "Gow-ee-chie." That was the way it sounded. Bob and Enith snuggled closer to Smith and watched Peo's face, and the faces of the absorbedly listening children. Later, at home, Smith translated the story to Bob and Enith.

He was also a good friend of the old Indian woman whom he had known for years. Her name, he said, was Smart Bear, and she was one hundred and eight years old. And at one hundred and eight years, she was as independent as she ever had been, coming and going as she pleased, living with any tribe that happened along when she wanted its temporary shelter. No one knew which was her real tribe. Maybe she herself no longer remembered, as she had married more than once into tribes other

than the one she was born in. To her an Indian was an Indian, and that was all there was to it.

Most of her time she spent at St. Peter's Mission, because she, too, loved Father Imoda. She had come from the mission that night when Bob and Enith first made her acquaintance.



Chapter 22

PLAYFELLOWS

ONE of Bob's chief difficulties while playing with the Indian boys was to remember their names, especially at first. Think of having playmates with names like these: Buffalo-don't-fall-down; Bull-that-turns-around; Don't-go-away; Charlie-U-know; Mud-head; Behind-the-ear; Walking-porcupine; Rotten-tail; Stabs-by-mistake, and others.

"They sound foolish to me," Bob complained to Smith. "How's a fellow to remember them?"

Smith laughed. "The Indians may think the names of white people just as foolish. Such for instance as my friends: Wild-goose-Bill; Ace-of-spades; Doughnut-Cal; Moon-eyed-Tom; Big-drink-Billy; Coffee-pot-Tom; Yeast-powder-Dick; Slap-jack-Johnny; Mush-head-Joe; Cock-tail-Billy; and many others. You know a lot like that yourself."

Bob did, and he remembered, too, how Longtooth laughed at the name Heel-and-Toe-Smith. So he complained no more, but again ran to Uncle Robert's place and begged him to let Fred and Annette come over, even for a little while. But to his and their great disappointment, Uncle Robert would not change his decision. He did not let any of his children out of his sight as long as the Indians were encamped at the Bells.

So Fred again gave Bob orders to write down every little thing which might be of use to them when they did not have to bow to anybody else's will. Bob learned from the Indian boys how to make bows and arrows, and how to use them to the best advantage till he became a very good shot. There were hunting and war-games, and the boy who was the hero of the day would be feasted by the girls with all kinds of dainty food and a dance in his honor, accompanied by a song of praise. Enith and Bob paid especial attention to the dance steps, and could soon do the funny little rise which comes in the middle of the step and is usually hard for a white person to grasp.

The girls when alone played just like white children, imitating the grown Indians by playing house, mother and father, hunting, visiting, baby, and so on. But my, they were superstitious! Every object seen indistinctly in the distance was a ghost in disguise, and they tried to please it by setting out food and other presents so that it would not hurt

them. Every unusual sound, especially after dark, was a ghost with evil intent. They used all kinds of charms to ward off the ghosts' influence, not only the children but the grown Indians as well. Some of the lodges kept a small fire burning all night because ghosts would not enter a tent in which there was a fire.

These Indians were early risers, so when Smith took Bob and Enith to their camp right after breakfast, everybody was already at work. In one corner four squaws were tanning buffalo-robcs which would probably be taken to Uncle Ted to be traded for cloth, beads, paint, and food.

Other women were carrying water from the creek in buckets made from hides. Some were busily gathering wood, some drying meat, some making a mixture of buffalo brains and liver to soften the robes they had to tan. Some of the squaws had babies on their backs while they worked, and occasionally they took them off and set them up against a tree or rock where they stood straight and stiff, strapped to a board, waiting patiently till mother was ready to give them attention, never crying, but looking interestedly at their surroundings, their big dark eyes wide open.

The young men of the tribe were getting ready to go hunting, and the chiefs sat smoking and talking. Soon Weasel-Eyes, who was about Enith's age, came to her, smiling shyly, and taking her by the hand asked her to come and see their new baby.

Enith was glad to go, for there was nothing in the world nicer to see and to hold than a new baby. She thought all babies were alike when they came into the world—pink and white like Bertie. But this Indian baby was a surprise. It was red as a brick from its little feet to its black hair, and it shone as though it had been dipped in grease.

The mother was dressing it for the day, or maybe for the week, and was winding strips of cloth so tightly around its little belly that Enith wondered how it was going to breathe. And it kept as quiet as a mouse, its eyes wide open. Enith asked Weasel-Eyes what made the baby so red and shiny, and the mother understood her gestures and laughed as she showed Enith a kind of red powdered earth which the Indians use as talcum powder; first greasing the baby all over so the powder will stick.

When it was dressed, the baby was strapped to its board and set aside to behave itself as it liked. Weasel-Eyes got her dolls and other playthings and took them and Enith to a group of girls who were playing house. They had the most wonderful dolls Enith ever had seen. Some were made of rags, and some of wood, but most were made of buckskin and had their faces painted on with red and black color. Their teeth were small white beads sewn in two straight rows across the bottom of the faces, and, with the flat noses, being merely marked with paint, and the tiny eyes, they were not a bit handsome. They had a cunning, savage expression

which almost scared Enith. She did not like to touch them at first, but their bead chains and bead-embroidered dresses made her forget their faces and she admired them and envied their owners.

The playhouses were little tepees and were set up in regular villages like the big ones. The girls made low fences around the willowsticks which they called their horses. Those with most branches were favorites because they kicked up the dust so beautifully when they were ridden fast and furiously. While some of the girls gathered firewood others got the feast ready for the boys who had already started out on a hunt, taking Bob with them.

The girls chattered a great deal over their work, and so did a group of squaws who were playing a real gambling game, and were very earnest about it. Their cards were little flat stones. The longer they played the more excited they became, and pretty soon two of them began to quarrel. The others took sides, shouting and gesticulating, and a regular fight was starting when one of the chiefs came and told them to be ashamed of themselves and threatening to punish them if they did not behave. They acted ashamed and continued to play, using only low tones and speaking no more than necessary.

The boys with whom Bob went hunting found what they wanted about two miles from the camp. It was a thickly settled prairie-dogs' town and they made believe the dogs were buffaloes. In a short time they had killed eight, and then skinned them

carefully and took out the tongues to dry and smoke. The best parts of the meat they took home for the girls to dry and take care of.

They went home in regular hunting-party order very proud of their game. The girls welcomed them with a feast of choice meat which their parents had given them and which they roasted before the fire, and with prunes and dried apricots which Enith had brought from home.

They all talked and laughed, eating and having a lot of fun. Bob and Enith understood almost everything they said, from the gestures, and they talked as much as the rest, whether they were understood or not.

After the feast the girls cleared away the remains while the boys went out to rope wild horses. Of course there were no wild horses, so they used the dogs who were not a bit exciting. When one was lassoed he did not snort and kick, or pull at his rope, but lay down meekly with his chin on his paws.

The game which the boys liked best of all was the horse-stealing game. Indians did not buy their horses in those days. They always stole them from their enemies, and he who stole the most was the most honored. These Indian boys, though not older than Bob, were already quite expert at the game. Without making the least noise they could crawl up to a pony picketed near its owner, cut the rope and make off with it before the owner knew there was an enemy near. Real Indian ponies seem to

understand this game, and like it, too, for they are just as quiet and quick as the thief himself, seeming to understand him by instinct, and helping him all they can. They change masters so often that they never know who is their real master.

When the thief was at a safe distance with the stolen horse, he would shout back a challenge, and send insulting words to the loser, daring him to come and take back his horse; he would swing himself low on one side of the animal, using it as a shield, and then again would stand erect in the stirrup, taunting, shouting, going as swiftly as was possible.

Bob loved this and learned to do some wonderful tricks on the backs of the ponies. Then Father found out about it, and put a stop to that particular game, lest Bob become a Jesse James.

Breaking colts was allowed. Indians' colts were not so hard to break as the colts belonging to white men. They seemed to come into the world with their spirits broken. Trading was another exciting game, because often it ended in a fight. Bob traded his jack-knife for a bow and arrow; his steel fish-hooks for a pair of buck-skin leggings; his hatchet for a rawhide lasso; and a picture-book for a pair of new moccasins all covered with bead-embroidery.

Mother did some trading, also, and soon had a nice collection of Indian articles.

Enith grew so eager to go to the Indian camp that she could not do her housework properly. When she was free she took her wax doll, and china dolls,

her set of dishes and some cookies, and ran to the camp. The girls were all seated on the ground with their dolls, and having the best kind of a time, when along came Master Bertie. He had followed Enith, unnoticed by Mother, and looked for her everywhere till he finally spied her sitting among the girls, and then ran to her to throw himself into her lap, unmindful of the dolls, tepees, and other toys under his feet, leaving a trail of destruction like that of a cyclone.

Some of the girls grew very angry, scolding and trying to fix up things, while others ran away tearfully, as though to tell their mothers. Enith was greatly frightened, and did all she could to straighten the injured articles, looking pleadingly from one girl to another, but none gave her a friendly glance. So she gathered up her own belongings, and was surprised to find a number missing. She had not the courage to ask for them, but looked longingly for Bob.

Bob was over at Uncle Robert's, reporting to Fred, and they agreed to be all ready to disappear just before these Indians broke camp. They would be on top of the Wolf Creek divide, pretending to be lost, and would let the Indians pick them up. The girls should not be told till the very last minute.

There was one thing concerning Indians about which Bob and Enith talked a lot in secret. They had never seen an Indian man, woman, or child, wash his face or take a bath. Of course they went

into the water, but not because they wanted to be clean. And the white men who associated with the Indians were even dirtier. The Indians at least did not have their faces covered with untidy, bushy, hair. But when it came to the hair on their heads, well, it was not hard at all to believe that some of the older ones came from monkeys.

At the councils the chiefs said things that were the finest kind of poetry, but the words and their voices were harsh and guttural, like a turkey's gobbling way down in its crop.

Chapter 23

A WAR-CRY IN THE NIGHT

IN THE meantime Bertie had discovered the new baby standing up on its board against a tree and fast asleep. He had never seen such a strange doll before, and he went to it, feeling its cheek to see if it were alive.

Enith hastened to pull him away, and he fell against the baby so hard that the frame slid to the ground, turning the papoose over on its face. It let out a single cry.

Enith was almost weeping with distress, and set the baby up again, brushing the dirt from its cover. Squaws came from all directions at that cry, demanding to know what had happened. They could see for themselves, and looked angry. Also they were amazed at Bertie's liberty with the order pipe standing at the chief's tent. They ran to take it away from him, but he struck the ground hard and smashed it before they could reach him. Indian children were taught never to touch the pipe.

Meanwhile the baby was unstrapped and examined for injuries. Amidst the chatter of women, reproaches of the children, the sniffing of hostile dogs, Enith snatched up Bertie and made her escape. She was weeping with fear, and soon saw Bob has-

tening toward the house, also looking scared. He had seen Bertie break the pipe.

Enith told Mother all about it, and Mother at once went to the camp to see if the baby were hurt; but when she reached there all the women and children had disappeared into their tents and paid no attention to her rapping and questions. She dared not enter a tent, nor even peer in, when they showed so plainly that they did not want to see her. So she returned to the house, wondering at the strange ways of the Indians.

Nothing more was seen of them the rest of that day. Enith was sure that her entire family would be scalped in the night. Bob thought so too. He would have been glad to see Longtooth or any of the other boys going down to the creek to fish, but all kept out of sight. It was a very unhappy afternoon.

When Heel-and-Toe-Smith said he was going back to Uncle Robert's, Bob decided to go along and report the conditions to Fred.

"Guess we'll have to change our plans a little, Fred," he said. "Those Indians are awfully mad at us, and it would be sure death for us to put ourselves into their hands." He then told what Bertie had done, and was sure that the Indians were getting ready to massacre the whole family.

"The thing for us to do now," said Fred, after they had discussed the situation, "is to find your

young Indian friend of the boat. We surely would be safe with him if he feels as grateful as he said."

"If we could only locate him!"

"We'll have to locate him, that's all!"

"All right. We'll write to Teepee, question Smith and everybody else who comes our way—if we live—till we learn something certain."

He ran home in a round-about way. It was already dusk in the canyon and on turning a bend he saw a shadowlike form disappear into the willows. Bob was frightened. He turned to go back to Uncle Robert's, and very distinctly saw an Indian disappearing down the road whence he himself had just come. The sight held him rooted. Both figures carried an air of mystery, and he could not recognize either.

Soon he heard, far away, the faint neigh of a horse, which was immediately answered by a neigh near him, and the sound struck terror to his heart. It was a signal of some sort. Fear suddenly made Bob light as air, for he scaled the perpendicular canyon side as on wings, never pausing to pick a foothold or to breathe. Over the top he went and recklessly let himself down the other side, landing across the creek from his home. Here he paused a moment to compose himself before plunging into the water with his shoes on.

The window-shades were up and he could see the family at supper, which was a reassuring sight. Hiding all signs of agitation he went in and joined

the others at the table, but he could not eat till the shades were down.

Bob, Enith, and Bertie, went to bed early, while Father and Mother sat up, reading. It was very still outdoors. Bob heard all kinds of imaginary sounds in the canyon, especially the muffled neighing of horses. Bertie slumbered untroubled, and finally Father and Mother also retired.

Again profound silence. And then, just at midnight, a sudden, loud, blood-freezing cry cut the stillness, making every member of the family sit up with a shock of fright, not breathing while listening. More cries came from the Indian camp, and were followed by a whirlwind of confusion. Enith and Mother fell back on their pillows, and Father and Bob ran to the gun-holes, rifles in hand.

Again that cry, louder and more terrible than anything they ever had heard before. A minute later came the thundering of many horses' hoofs, intermingled with war-whoops. Father added yet a bar to the door. When the noise and confusion were positively bewildering, Father suddenly exclaimed, "Don't be afraid, Mother! They are going past the house!"

It was true. The galloping horses, shouting Indians, and whizzing bullets were flying Helenawards. Father kept the house dark and he and Bob held their posts at the gun-holes. Their relief was short-lived, for soon to their horror the house began to fill with smoke, and Father heard the crackling of

flames at the back door. He whispered to Bob, and going into the shed closed the door behind him and threw the entire water supply on the flames, checking their progress. As he did this he heard a single command in a voice strangely familiar but elusive.

It was plain that terrible things were happening right in front of the house. After awhile when the sounds died down a little, the Bells were startled anew by a loud and peremptory knock on the front door. No one stirred. The knock was repeated, more impatiently. Enith slid under the bed, and Bob was for once too terrified to laugh at her. When the pounding came a third time it was accompanied by the voice of Chief Peo, who told Father to open the door at once as he needed his help.

So Father lighted the lamp and opened the door. Chief Peo and four of his warriors came in, fuming with rage.

"Write to the authorities at Helena," Peo commanded, "That a band of thieving Crows has stolen thirty of my horses and are headed that way. The letter must go up on the coach in the morning."

Father got pen and paper and seated himself, writing as Peo dictated. It was a funny letter, so far as the wording went. Mother was tremendously relieved to find that the Indians were fighting among themselves, and vaguely wondered whether Indians could count higher than thirty.

"My young warriors are following them," Peo added, "and if they fail to get them, Helena must."

Then he and his men walked all over the house as though they owned it, taking the bear-berry decorations from the walls and smoking them, helping themselves to bread and sugar, talking excitedly all the time to each other. For two hours they remained, Enith seeing nothing but their moccasined feet, wondering what they were doing. Then they went away, again telling Father that the letter must go up on the stage in the morning.

The door had hardly closed upon them when it was again thrust open and a squaw entered carrying a shot-gun. Father gave the family a sign to be on guard, for the woman seemed to be on deadly business.

Father stood without budging, even when she lifted the gun, for she was too near to aim at him. Her dark face was scowling and words were spattering from her lips as she held the weapon towards Father and made him understand that it would not work.

He examined it and found that the trigger stuck at a certain spot, refusing to loosen the hammer. The squaw watched him closely as he worked over it, finally getting the oil can and letting a few drops fall on the obstinate spot. Immediately the trouble disappeared. The woman grabbed the gun, and after trying it several times,—it was not loaded—and finding it working to perfection, she threw back her head with a laugh declaring, "Indian heap big fool!" and ran away to take it to her man.

"Do you know whose gun that was?" Father asked when she had gone.

"No. Whose?"

"Teasdale's. His name was plainly marked on the under side."

Mother, Bob and Enith were greatly shocked. "Poor Teasdale," Bob whispered to Enith. "They killed him, sure. And they're so friendly with the white people that one would never suspect them of such underhanded work. It's lucky we're not going with this band—now that we know about Teasdale. Tomorrow I'll tell Fred."

Chapter 24

THE SPOILS

IN THE morning the camp was very quiet. If anyone was killed or wounded in the night's skirmish, all traces had been carefully removed.

Father went about his outdoor chores as usual, Bob helping. It was thought better to act unafraid. Later Bob and Enith went up the creek to get some fish for dinner, in an opposite direction from the camp, and took Bertie along, keeping well in sight of the house.

They found some cherries almost ripe. Bob had learned to swallow them whole, as the Indians did, and these were so puckery that they left the mouth all drawn together.

Presently the same loud clatter of horses' hoofs that had so frightened them in the night, struck their ears, coming from an opposite direction to the camp, and mingling with yells of triumph.

They crouched in the brush where they could see without being seen, and the returning warriors dashed into sight, driving and leading their own horses, with a lot of new ones beside. As they passed the Bell house they proudly displayed enemy scalps dangling from poles. They reached their camp wild

with enthusiasm, and soon preparations for a feast were started.

While Bob and Enith had been absorbed in the warriors, Bertie stuffed himself with cherries from Enith's cup, imitating Bob in swallowing, and the cup was nearly empty when Enith discovered the fact and in alarm took Bertie home to be treated by Father.

By this time the noise at the camp had grown so loud that Father again barricaded the doors and windows. One never could tell what an Indian might take a notion to do when drunk with blood and victory. These plainly had had no fear of night-fighting.

The afternoon was spent in great preparations, and in the evening a scalp-dance took place. The victors were wonderfully decorated for the occasion, and with every minute grew more savage and excited over their capture and the blood they had spilled. They told over and over how wonderfully they had fought, making all the gestures of murdering and scalping the enemy, being furiously applauded and praised by the listeners. Each tried to outdo the others, usually winding up by holding the scalp high to be viewed and then falling into a fit of such frenzy that foam came to the lips.

After dark Father went quietly to the top of the knoll to see the celebration. But Mother stayed close to Bertie who had a high fever, tossing about on the bed and whining with pain. He had filled his

stomach with cherry-stones, and Father had tried every remedy at hand to relieve a condition that refused to be relieved.

Soon Bertie grew delirious and did not recognize the different members of the family. Bob and Enith were white with fear as they anxiously studied Mother's face whenever she came through the room with a new remedy. Nothing helped.

By the next evening Bertie was so ill that Father declared he should go to the Indian village for advice, as the Indians themselves must have had the same trouble with their children and would know what to do. Mother was afraid to let him go as the hideous noises of the three-day celebration were at their height. Besides, they had not been able to learn anything about the new baby which might really have been hurt by Bertie.

However, Bertie's condition was growing alarming, and there was no other refuge. So Father walked firmly to the Indian camp and approached a group of Indian women who were preparing another feast. He said "How" very politely, and they looked up indifferently and went on with their work as though he were not there at all.

But he saw the new baby napping comfortably in a corner, and this gave him the courage to go on. He asked a small boy which was the tepee of the squaw who was hit in the head by a ghost-arrow (meaning crazy) and the lad pointed out the tepee of the old woman who had been insulted by Bertie.

Father went to her and explained, and she seemed to understand right away. She nodded and re-entered her tepee where she made up a bundle of mysterious things and then came out ready to accompany Father.

With her toothless gums, wild white hair, dark wrinkled face, and clawlike fingers, she looked more witchlike than ever, and Bob and Enith were afraid for Bertie, feeling sure she was going to get even with him. To Mother she looked like one who understood her business and she led her to Bertie's bedside and anxiously watched her face as she threw the covers back and felt Bertie up and down, pressing on a certain spot till groans came from him and she nodded, satisfied.

From her mysterious bundle she took a bottle made from hide and asked for a cup. Father brought her one and she poured into it a yellow oily fluid which she held to Bertie's lips, making him swallow a little at a time, without knowing it. Every little while she set the cup down and rolled Bertie from side to side and gently massaged his stomach.

Enith peeked in as the woman was hypnotizing Bertie to drink, and she burst out crying.

"She's giving him poison!" she declared, and could not be comforted till Father examined the fluid and found it to be pure bear's oil.

When Bertie had swallowed almost a cupful of the oil, and had been massaged to her satisfaction, the woman covered him, smoothed the bedclothes,

smiled at Mother, and took up her bundle and shawl. Her assurance was most comforting.

Mother asked her about pay, but these Indians were used to trading, and she did not seem to know the value of greenbacks that Mother showed her. So Mother made up a package of sugar, coffee, and flour, and the woman beamed—in spite of her old-fashioned taste for food. When Mother added a bright red blanket, the woman really seemed overwhelmed with joy.

Bertie showed improvement in less than an hour. The family breathed freely again.

Bob and Enith were eager to see some of the dancing, so when it was quite dark, and the fresh bread baked, Father took them along to deliver bread to the Indian woman. The dance was in full swing when they reached the camp and they stood some minutes in the shadow watching the strange performance.

The dancers, almost naked, were painted in different colors and designs of especial meaning. They had already been celebrating so long one would have expected them to play out. But they did not seem tired. They danced, chanted, flourished enemy-scalps on poles, and again showed exactly how they took the scalps from the enemy's head. And every time they did so their listeners cheered frantically.

Father advanced, and soon Chief Peo came hastily to his side and in a round-about way led the three to his tent. Father guessed that strangers were not sup-

posed to witness the rites. Peo said, "They must not see you while they are like that. Already Smart Bear has irritated them by forbidding them to bother you in any way. They have to respect her age and standing, you know, even when her tongue stings."

Then he told Father about the fight. How his warriors had overtaken the thieves and killed every one, beside securing a large number of horses with their own. "It was our most feared enemy, Eagle Claw himself, who stole to our camp and all alone drove off thirty of our finest horses," Peo explained, not disguising his admiration for the daring young man, "and he would have succeeded had he not turned back at a critical moment to keep his hot-headed companions from setting fire to your house. He must have been a pretty good friend to you to take such chances."

Father did not remember having an Indian friend named Eagle Claw, but he did not say so. Peo went on: "While he was driving the horses away alone, his friends fell upon our camp and gave us some hard fighting. But my son and his friends followed Eagle Claw, and my son put an arrow straight through Eagle Claw's neck. He rode five miles with it sticking out at both ends, under fire all the time. When his horse dropped under him he sprang to his feet, and, with his back to a tree, defended himself nobly. But, of course, there were too many for him. They tied him to the tree and burned him. This is all that was left of him."

From under his robe he drew a charred piece of black velvet with a red rose embroidered on it. Then Father knew who Eagle Claw was. He also knew why the brave young man wanted to capture the horses without help of any kind. He asked if he might show Mother the piece of scarf, and Chief Peo let him take it. He advised Father not to offer the bread to the old Indian woman, but to go away as quietly as he could, by the creek path, and be on his guard, as the frenzy had reached the peak of danger.

So Father, Bob, and Enith stole home, and told Mother all about the battle and the burning of the brave young Indian, not betraying who he was till at the end of the story Father showed her the piece of sash saying, "This is all that was left of him."

Mother recognized the scarf-end at once, and cried.

Father strengthened the barricades, saying, "Our chief danger lies in the fact that we were Eagle Claw's friends."

"And our escape from being burnt to death was also due to being a friend of Eagle Claw," Mother returned. They prepared to sit up all night, it promising to be the most anxious night they ever should know.

At about ten o'clock Major Harris with an escort of soldiers unexpectedly arrived from Fort Shaw. Without paying the slightest attention to the Indians they pitched their tents on the river-bank

in front of the Bells' house, and proceeded to have a sociable time with the family.

The next morning the Indian camp had vanished as silently as mist. And with it went the very best chance the Northern Lights had had; and because of it went every possibility of being befriended by Eagle Claw.

Disappointments coming so thick and fast made the Northern Lights decide to break away at once and strike out on their own.

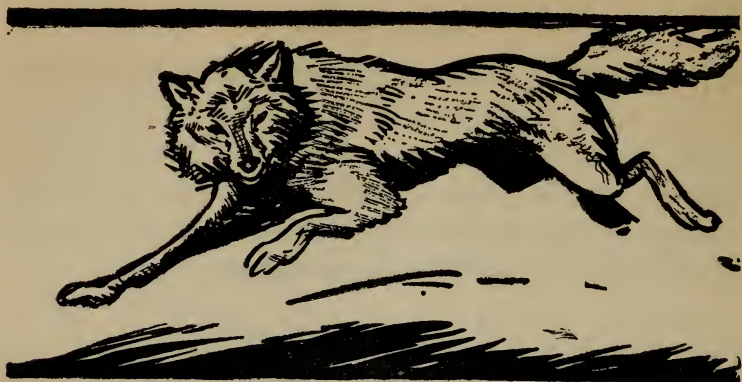
Ever since the Bells left the Bird Tail, Charlie had been urging the stage company to transfer him to Uncle Robert's place, and that now came to pass. Everybody was very glad, except Heel-and-Toe Smith.

With Charlie came Othello and the cats—valuable additions to the collection of the Northern Lights.

Smith was genuinely fond of every one of the children, and maybe because of his lonely life, he wanted to hold the first place in their affection—after the family, of course. When a stage-driver, stock-tender or any other outsider tried to make himself liked by giving the children presents and playing with them, Smith always found some reason why they should not like him. He was especially jealous of Charlie. And even of Ted when he was present on a visit.

He would have been more jealous of Teepee than anyone else had he known him. But Teepee was not to be found. He was not forgetting. In spite

of his youth he made application after application to become a Government scout, serving here and there on approval, coming into and going out of people's notice as he wished. Always he appeared when there was trouble with the Indians, and always he preferred to battle with the Sioux.



Chapter 25

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS came around again, and the two families met at Uncle Robert's to celebrate the holidays.

As usual on Christmas eve the children had to go to bed early in order to be out of the way of busy Santa. They slept in one room arranged for the purpose and had no end of fun with pillow fights, story-telling, teasing, trying to peek into the living-room, and tumbling back into bed whenever steps sounded near.

Mother, Father, Aunt Lena, Uncle Robert, and Charlie, were up most of the night, and when the tree was ready it was wonderfully beautiful. Just before daylight the second bell rang, coming slowly towards the house and making the children sit up and ask each other if it was the first or second bell. It kept ringing longer than the first usually did, so

they knew it was morning and scrambled into their clothes.

They had had many a fine Christmas, but this tree was far more beautiful than anything in their dreams. It was ablaze with lights and new ornaments. For Annette and Enith there were two big wax dolls, the very ones they had prayed for every night, one having a pink hair-ribbon and sash, and the other a blue hair-ribbon and sash. For Fred there was a real pistol, just like a man's, and very handy for rattlers and other dangerous things. Bob received a large mouth-harmonica with a bell on top, and everybody wanted to play on it. For Bertie there was a wooden horse harnessed to a cart, and for Baby Rose a worsted man with cymbals that tinkled when he was pressed in the middle.

When Bob, Fred, Enith and Annette had admired their presents they ran to the bed-room and brought forth presents they had made for the grown people. For Mother and Aunt Lena there were tidies with goats and roses in the center; for Father, Uncle Robert and Charlie there were crocheted wristers and mittens. Heel-and-Toe Smith received a brightly colored pin-cushion in cross-stitch embroidery.

After the presents were distributed, each person received a plate with nuts, figs, candy, and dried fruit. Then Aunt Lena brought in the coffee and cake, and everybody was happy.

They were still at breakfast when a rig drew up

to the front door and someone wrapped in furs like a real Santa leaped to the ground shouting "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas to everybody!" It was Uncle Ted.

When he got through hugging and kissing everybody he took package after package out of the wagon, making fresh shivers of expectation run around on the children's backs. He brought Enith and Annette new dresses just alike. Bertie received a pair of copper-toed boots, his very first, and he stalked through the house making an awful noise and kicking everything that came in his way. For Bob there was a strong knife with many blades, and for Fred a sharp little ax no larger than a hatchet. The boys were especially pleased with their remembrances because they were so useful for the scheme. Baby Rose received a China lady-doll with blue glass ear-rings. The grown people were all remembered, too.

In the evening when the tree was lighted again and the parents gathered around the punch-bowl to listen to Doctor Fogli read a Christmas poem which Father had written for him, Fred and Bob motioned Uncle Ted to come into the store-room which was used as a playroom in bad weather, and when he was there they locked the door and told him their secret about the Northern Lights. They had decided that it was necessary to have a member down at the fort, and Ted was the very best they could possibly have. He listened very seriously to their

plan and when they invited him to join he shook hands with each member saying,

"I feel honored with your invitation to become a Northern Light, and if getting Sitting Bull is your main object, I'm with you to my last breath. I give you my word of honor that I'll keep your secret."

They felt big and important at Ted's earnestness. "Now we'll have to initiate you," Fred told him, and they drew together to repeat the Northern Lights' vow, saying it three times with hands clasped over a common center.

"Maybe you can tell us something new about Sitting Bull," said Fred.

"At present he's pretending to be resigned to the orders from the Government, but the authorities know that secretly he is receiving information about the forts, the amount of ammunition in each, the number of soldiers, the amount of food, the names of the Government scouts, and the plans of the settlers. There is one scout though who slips around like an eel and keeps his name a secret. He is disguised as an Indian most of the time and reports to General Gibbon everything he can learn in the camp of Sitting Bull."

The Northern Lights looked at each other with the word Teepee in their eyes.

"Uncle Ted will you teach us how to trap wolves and other animals before you go back to the fort?"

"You bet I will. We'll start out tomorrow morning."

So, early the next day they started out, Charlie going along, and Smith staying at home and pouting.

It was exciting business. The wolves in that section of country where there were fewer buffaloes were so starved that they could hardly be driven from the poisoned bait, and they died only a few yards from it. Some were caught in traps. Before very long there was such a big stack of frozen pelts in the shed that the girls were afraid to pass through it after dark, for as sure as they did, a thawing leg or tail would move out of position, seemingly alive, sending them screaming into the living-room.

Fred and Bob laughed at them and pitied them for being so cowardly. They spent a lot of time in the summer-shed, examining their especial catches, and proud as Indians over their enemy's scalp. Uncle Ted took the hides with him when he returned to Benton, and soon sent Fred and Bob their share of the money for them.

Since Uncle Ted had mentioned the mysterious scout who dodged the Indians, the Northern Lights talked a lot about Teepee. They had told Ted about him, and he promised to keep an eye open for him.

It was very lonesome after Ted left, and Smith tried to take his place in pleasing the children. He was so entertaining, and seemed to know so much

about outdoor life that Fred suggested the Northern Lights learn from him all he knew.

Without telling him their object they coaxed him to go up the canyon with them on one of the very coldest days of the winter, pretending they were looking for a good place to skate.

Smith declared that it was too cold to skate or to go much farther, but he felt responsible for them and stayed with them till their hands and faces began to ache, and the tears froze on their cheeks.

The girls weakened first, saying they were going home. Smith was sputtering, swinging his arms and threatening to turn back with Enith and Annette. There was not a hint of fun, or comfort, in any direction and Fred whispered to Bob, "Now let's ask Smith what he'd do if he were lost and freezing, and hungry, like this. You ask him."

Bob wiped the tears from his face on the back of his mittens, stamped his numb feet furiously, and clapped his hands together while blubbering, "Gosh, Mr. Smith, I'm freezing! I can't wait to get home! What'll I do! What'll I do!" He danced about, blowing on his hands and putting them under his arms.

The girls had been near tears before Bob spoke, and now let out howls of pain and started to run home. But Fred called to them,

"You babies! But you're good ones for—for a certain scheme, you!" He was very unhappy himself but could still bluff.

Smith puckered his frost-stiffened face into a network of wrinkles murmuring, "Dear, dear, this is a nasty mess!" Then he assumed bravery, and, shakingly whistling snatches of "Mary of Argyle," led Fred, Bob, Enith and Annette, to the river's edge where in a jiffy he gathered brush for a blaze and laid pine twigs on it while he went for heavier material. The four Northern Lights sat down around the fire, and took off their gloves and overshoes, thawing out their hands and feet at the fire. Smith went up the hillside for a log.

"Of course we could think of making a fire," Bob whispered. "Anybody would know that much. But if we were starving and there wasn't any kind of game around, what would we do? You ask Smith when he comes."

And then as though to answer the question himself, Smith came hastening around the bend swinging a grouse which he had just killed with a stick.

"If you're hungry, just watch me," he said as he stripped off the feathers and neatly fastened pieces of the bird to pointed sticks which he gave to the Northern Lights and showed them how to cook the meat at the fire. This was fun, and the roasting meat smelled so good and tasted so much better, that everybody was put in a good humor.

"What would you do if you were starving and didn't find a grouse?" Fred asked.

Smith winked at him, "I have more than one way," he said. "I'll show you when I finish this."

They waited for Smith to devour his meat. When that was done Smith led them on to the ice, testing it carefully at different places, and, when satisfied, kneeling and marking a small square with his knife. He cut into the mark till it was deep enough for the ice to be broken in, which he did with a few gentle taps. But he did not let it fall into the water. He lifted it out carefully, making as little noise as possible, and then bent over the hole and looked in.

"What do you see?" Bob eagerly asked, and Smith motioned him forward, telling him to see for himself. Bob peered into the dark hole and soon dimly saw scores of fishes leisurely swimming about, seeming somewhat dazed, but plainly looking for food. Bob was so excited that Fred pulled him away to have a look himself, and when Smith dropped a bit of meat into the hole, a perfect deluge of trout, suckers and half-breeds came in a wave to snatch it.

"If we only had a hook and line!" Fred exclaimed, while Enith and Annette were dragging him away so they, too, could see the fishes.

"Don't worry about such a little thing as a hook and line," said Smith, fumbling in his many pockets and finally discovering a piece of string. He cut it in two equal parts and made of one a noose which he let down into the water, and on the other he fastened a small piece of meat and let it down, dangling in front of the noose.

The fish were perfectly crazy, Smith jerking them

out as fast as he could, and even without bait it was not hard to snare them. Fred and Bob were busy carving out fish-holes for themselves, for Fred had found a fish-hook among the junk in his pocket, and Bob had a roll of twine which he had collected a little at a time. As everybody wanted to fish, Smith had to cut another hole for one of the girls, and he gave up his own to the other. There was enough string for all, and when everybody was busy Smith went up the creek for more fuel as the cold did not stay in the background, no matter how absorbing the occupation of the fishermen. The girls returned to the embers.

"Smith knows an awful lot, don't he?" Bob admiringly remarked.

"He does know an awful lot," Fred replied, "but right now I can show you something he don't know, and that is how to be comfortable while fishing."

He went down the stream, in an opposite direction from Smith, gathered a heap of brush, and started a rattling fire close to the fish-hole where Bob was busy. It crackled and roared upward, and Fred sent Bob for more fuel while he himself sat down on the ice and began to warm his feet. The girls came and sat down beside him.

"Only two at a time can sit," Fred ordered. "Enith, you help Bob, and you two can have the next turn."

Bob and Enith heaped the brush high, making a big and hot blaze, till presently there came a loud

report, like a gun-shot, running up the river and making the fire quiver. A rim of ice appeared near the fire, and in another moment Fred and Annette were sliding forward so fast that their feet were in the icy water before they could grab the hands Bob and Enith were holding to them. All kept frantically calling for Smith. Another sounding report and the whole fire went down and floated away under the ice.

Fred and Annette continued to slide but managed to hold on to Bob's coat till Smith came on a gallop and drew them to safe ground. Fred saw his fine string of fish go under the ice and follow the fire. But there was no time to lament. Smith drove them home as fast as they could run, and even then Fred's feet were frost-bitten.

Smith, as usual, made a long visit, attending to Fred's feet, helping with the chores, teaching the children to dance, determined to please.

At the end of every lesson Aunt Lena made him a toddy, which greatly strengthened him. When he thought he did not earn his keep with dance-lessons, he would split kindling, carry water from the spring, wipe the dishes, and in other ways be handy in the corrals and outbuildings. He never worked very hard. They would not let him because he was so thin and looked as though he had tuberculosis.

In warm weather Smith took the children to the distant swimming-hole which was even better than

the Nothern Lights' pool by the big tree. From one side of it a claybank rose straight in the air for almost thirty feet, and it was made of layers of different colors, pink, blue, yellow, and mixed. Smith showed them how to form cups and saucers, plates, pitchers and vases, and this they considered very important knowledge, working by the hour. The dainty pink and blue articles they dried in the sun, but the heavy pottery was fired in a real fire, many bursting, but those that came through the fire lasting a long time if handled with consideration.

Smith also taught them how to make snares that never failed to catch a grouse or rabbit. And more important than all, he taught them the sign language and Indian signalling.

"Indians who are on the move and expect others to follow," he said, speaking slowly for Fred to write it down, "turn over big stones with the pointed ends showing the direction. And if they have found buffaloes they place three small stones on top of the big one. Two small stones on top of the big one means that they are chasing the enemy. One stone means that they need help. A lot of little sticks placed around the big stone show how many there are of the enemy. They also use tree-branches to point the direction they have gone, and that they have found game.

"If you come to an Indian village or camp and find a broken arrow beside the door of a certain lodge you'll know that someone has died there. Red-

willow sticks in the ground near a door mean that there is nobody at home. If an Indian hands you a bunch of arrows with their heads broken off, it means that he has stopped being your enemy."

"Tell us about fire signals," Bob interrupted, but Smith had to wait for Fred to catch up first.

"Smoke and fire signals are so common that almost anybody, Indian or white, can easily read them," Smith went on when Fred was ready. "For their smoke signals the Indians go to the highest place near their camp and make a little fire from dung and other stuff that makes smoke but not blaze. To make the puffs of smoke they cover the fire for a few seconds with a buffalo-robe, then lift it for a few seconds, and then cover it again, each lift making a decided puff. One puff with a long time between it and the next means that the enemy is near. Two puffs and a long time before two more puffs mean that their camp is near. Three puffs with a long time between them and the next three, mean an attack by the enemy, and great danger. Four puffs are a call for help. These puffs carry messages as far as thirty miles in a few minutes, even farther, if the eyes of the Indian scouts that are watching for them, are good.

"The night signals are prettier and easier to see than the day signals."

"Why?"

"They show up better, for one thing. All Indian settlements have their signal hills, and they call

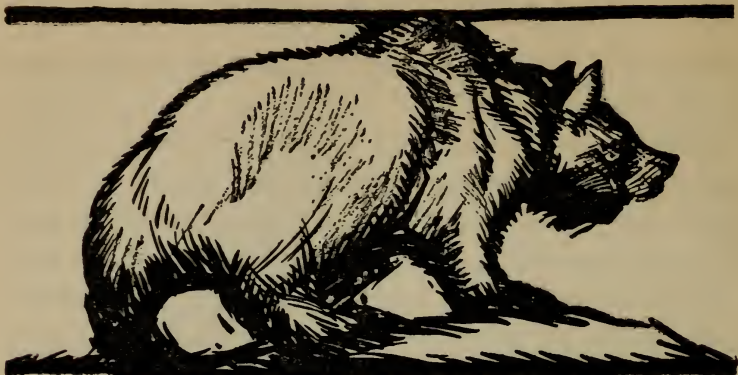
other tribes to councils, feasts, dances, and to fights, by making one, two, three, or four fires in a straight row on top of the hill. The number of fires depends on what they want to signal. When the fire burns steadily for a long time, the Indians and white people for fifty miles around know that the enemy is gathering for war, and they have to get ready or flee. Other signals are made by forming a large cylinder of willow frame-work, funnel-shaped, and covering it with hides. To signal, they put the cylinder over the fire, lifting and lowering it one, two, three, or four times, according to the information they want to send—just like the smoke signals of the day. If the cover is lowered and lifted many times with short spaces between, it means that there is to be a council the next night. If it is lifted and lowered five times with one long space, and then five times again, it means that the scouts have discovered the buffalo, and all the camp is happy. An invitation to a scalp or war dance is sent by letting the light burn a long time and then making a lot of short dark spaces.”

“Did you ever see fire-arrows?”

“Yes. They are the prettiest of all. The Indians wrap the arrowheads in soft, slow-burning bark which burns quite brightly, and they send out one, two, or three in quick succession according to what they want to say. The trouble with the arrows is that they can't be seen nearly as far as the signal

fires; but they are always at hand and can be used in emergencies."

After all this information, the Northern Lights again held a meeting to consider whether or not they should take Smith into the band. They talked a long time and finally arrived at the conclusion that Smith was very weak and might die on their hands, that he had to have whisky to keep him alive, and that he might not care to join, in which case he would have their secret and might sometime betray them, unknowingly.



Chapter 26

BEARS

FOUR bears! A papa-bear, a mama-bear, and two baby-bears! They were marching leisurely up the trail in single file, seeming to have no idea of anybody's nearness. The Northern Lights ducked in the brush and considered what to do. The girls were for running home, but Fred would not hear of it. They had to learn how to handle such situations, and the sooner the better. He ordered Bob to sneak back to the house and get Father's rifle without being seen. In the meantime he and the girls kept their eyes on the bears, who paused every now and then to turn over rocks for the ants under them and to pull berries from the low bushes.

The father bear ate everything he found, but the mother bear always called the little ones when she turned over a rock, and they put their snouts to-

gether and ate. She showed them very plainly how to do the trick themselves, and when they pushed each other she cuffed them on the ear. Bob soon returned with the gun and wanted, dreadfully, to have a shot at them himself, but he had to obey his Captain.

Fred sneaked up the canyon side, hiding behind rocks and shrubs till he was near enough to aim, and shot at the father-bear. All four animals were terribly startled, and the father immediately turned his back on his family and fled to shelter with all the grace of a galloping wash-boiler. The mother drove her children to the nearest tree, pushing them, and spanking them along to make them go faster. She succeeded in getting them up, and then took her place under the tree, facing the enemy.

It came to Fred that here at last was his chance to end all dispute about his captaincy, and to show those girls that he could be as brave as any Indian that ever lived. So, in spite of Annette's pleading, he shot the mother bear dead. Then, flushed with success, he climbed up the tree and caught one of the cubs by the leg; but instantly a bunch of little claws buried themselves in his hand and he let go, dropping to earth with a yell of surprise, which made the girls laugh.

Fred wound a kerchief around his scratched hand. "We'll have to chop the tree down," he said, and they knew it was an order. So the girls formed as much of a circle as they could while Bob chopped

and Fred stood with pointing gun. When the tree finally fell it crushed one of the cubs to death. The other one scurried through the ring and disappeared into the same clump of brush that shielded its father.

"Another surround!" Fred commanded, and the four encircled the brush, coming together slowly, beating all the time; but when they met in the center there was nothing there to beat. The sly creatures had misled them.

The skin of the mother bear, and the tender steaks of the baby were the trophies of the afternoon. These were small black bears, not nearly so big as grizzlies.

Fred felt more important than ever. And no wonder. Both families praised him. "Now I don't want to hear anything more about mutiny," he laughingly said to the girls.

Though he laughed, he realized keenly how much more depended on him now, and also realized that there were only two more chances left. Only two! And he responsible! He ordered Enith to write to Teepee, informing him that the Northern Lights were ready to run away from home for sure, and that they depended on him to meet them without fail on the top of the Wolf Creek divide two weeks after the date of the letter. They were putting much hope in his coming and his help in the big undertaking.

The letter was addressed to Fort Shaw.

The next day was Saturday, and Fred and Ann-

ette came over early because there was so much to do. The sheet-iron stove was hauled out and put on the bob-sled and packed with food and kitchen utensils.

"What's all the fuss about?" Mother asked, unexpectedly appearing in the kitchen door when they thought her putting Bertie to sleep.

"We—we're going to have a little pic-nic," Bob nervously explained.

"Picnic nothing! All your Saturday work is waiting to be done. Take Bertie with you when you clean the chicken-house!"

"We'll just have to go away at once," Fred declared when Mother had closed the door. "There are only two chances left. Think of it! Only two! Something has to be done to make up for the lost ones, and we'll begin this very minute by deciding not to unpack that pic-nic stuff until we unpack it in our own freedom. And first we'll go into the canyon where no one can hear us and let out all the swear words that have been collecting inside of us so long!"

Nothing could have been more welcome than this order, and the Northern Lights followed their Captain for almost a mile till they reached an open space where a ring of boulders formed a circle, probably placed so by Indians, and, unmindful of the black warnings of a shower, each selected a stone to stand on, as directed by Fred.

"When I give the signal—like this—" he snapped

his fingers three times, "everybody forget everything else and just swear with all your might. We'll have to hurry or the lightning might strike us." They obeyed, each one as high on a rock as he could stand, and at the signal from Fred letting out the strangest medley of words ever heard anywhere on the globe. With every new one their laughter burst out afresh and their courage rose in keeping, their voices waxing louder and louder, sounding astonishingly bad till their breath gave out and they stopped, frightened, aware that an echo, different from any other they ever had heard, caught up their words and rolled them down the canyon towards Uncle Robert's. They stood panting and listening, and when the last word was about to die out in the distance it suddenly took new life and began to come back again, growing louder with every moment, and ending with a spooky quaver.

They ran together, wordless, standing in the center of the circle, holding each other's hands, hardly breathing, afraid to speak till the last long-drawn-out word was repeated with blood curdling emphasis, ending in the weird laugh of a crazy person.

The girls covered their faces with their hands. Fred's teeth were chattering together, but he managed to shout "Run!" and they did.

Arrived at the house they had to wait outside for a few minutes to calm down, and then went in slowly and shame-facedly, expecting to be asked where they had been. But neither Father nor Mother paid any

attention to them, being thoughtfully interested in something else, and sitting down to supper without speaking.

"We'll have to go home right after supper," Annette remarked, and Mother said, "No, Charlie went home a short time ago, and I sent word that you'd stay here overnight."

It was not a very jolly evening. The Northern Lights sprawled on the buffalo-robe in front of the open fire and tried to entertain themselves in the old way—riddles which they could tell and answer backwards, songs, stories, and so forth. But everything fell flat. They yawned an awful lot.

After a while Mother looked anxiously at Father and said, "We might as well tell the children the news that came on the coach today."

Father drew a letter from his pocket and after reading it silently, said, "The news is that the Bell family will get ready immediately to go back to Chicago."

Mother and Father expected some expression of joy or surprise from their own children, but dead silence followed Father's words. Then Enith burst into tears, and Annette followed her lead. The boys said Gosh and Gee under their breath. They went to bed earlier than usual, all sleeping in the guest-room which had two beds. They talked so late and so earnestly that Father had to quiet them at last. When the door closed on Father Bob whispered,

"Then it is all settled this time for sure?" and Fred answered, "You bet your life."

The letter which Father did not read aloud to the children brought the information that Sitting Bull, down on the Tongue River, was forming three powerful bands. One was to move directly north, one northeast, and the other northwest, to clean up the entire territory of its white people. Sitting Bull had received peremptory orders from Washington to settle on the reservation or be severely punished, and he thought the time for his master stroke had come.

Chapter 27

A BREAKAWAY AT LAST

THE following morning Fred, Bob, Enith, and Annette showed repressed excitement. Father and Mother were so absorbed in their own affairs that they did not ask any questions or interfere with their secret labors that lasted throughout the day.

At supper Enith and Annette kept their eyes on the boys' faces, saying not a word. The boys, too, were silent, looking down at their plates whenever they met Father's or Mother's glances. Usually they were so noisy and talkative at the table that they had to be asked to keep still. When the family rose from the table the boys gave the girls a meaning look, making them shiver inside.

"Don't go far," said Mother as they were leaving the house. "It grows dark early these nights."

"We're going to our house," Fred boldly answered. "My Mother expects Bob and Enith to stay all night, if you'll let them."

"Yes, they may stay one night. Father will go with you to the last crossing."

The four went away slowly and seemingly indifferently, Father walking a short distance behind them. When he had seen them safely across the last creek-crossing which was quite near Uncle Robert's

house, hidden by trees, he returned home. He had scarcely left them when they changed their course and ran with all their might to a cache where they had hidden their hats, coats, blankets, picnic food, and the horse, Maggie. They tied their baggage to her back and started out.

"When our house is built, we'll come back for the pig, cow, hen and saw," said Fred. "Everybody be on the watch for Teepee."

They walked in single file up the Wolf Creek canyon which was not so familiar to them as the Prickly Pear canyon. But the Indians always went that way, so there had to be a trail over the divide.

For an hour they talked a lot, feeling brave and daring. Then suddenly the trail disappeared, leaving before them a great expanse of unknown country and making the creek run in the wrong direction. Not a familiar landmark was to be seen anywhere.

The sun was sinking into its usual bed of fire; the night-hawk's lonesome call and the startling swoop of its broad wings brought the first thoughts of loneliness. They stopped to get their bearings, and for half an hour talked about the trail that ought to have been there but was not.

"Besides, the rock wall with Indian writing and the creek running at its foot should be here. Don't you think so, Bob?" Fred asked.

"I don't know. *I've* never been this far before,"

Bob answered in tones that implied, "I thought *you* knew all about it."

"Are we about—five miles from home?" Enith asked in a rather small voice, looking back for a glimpse of the chimney.

"Almost ten," Fred promptly answered, though they were less than four. They all looked back now, and Fred added in an off-hand manner, "As long as we're so far and it's getting dark we might as well camp right here for the first night. In the morning it will be easy to find the trail again."

These were welcome words to Enith and Annette, for the funny tight feeling inside of them made anything seem better than moving on.

"Let's go to that little clearing near the creek," Bob suggested. "There's good grass there for Maggie, and we can see all around us in case—in case of fire."

So they went to the clearing and pitched into the work of getting boughs for bedding, wood for the morning fire, hanging the grub on trees out of reach of ground-creatures, and making up the bed while there remained a little daylight to guide them. They had only one heavy blanket, but had brought two old bear-skins and a much worn buffalo-robe.

Their one night out at the Bird Tail had taught them the value of the canvas which Fred had taken to use as a tent while the house was being built, and which in the meantime could help to keep rain, cold, bugs and mice out of the bed.

When this was all done, and the stillness and darkness were making themselves felt, Fred started a fire and they sat about it discussing tomorrow's doings. Annette and Enith kept looking over their shoulders, for the shadows were beginning their night tricks, especially down in the willows at the creek. The trees on the opposite bank were beginning to walk—yes, sir, really, truly, walk! Annette saw them. And soon there came out of the veiled distance a mournful cry, and they huddled together trying to decide whether it was a wolf, Indian, or wild-cat.

"Let's get into bed," Enith whispered with prickling nose, and the others were as eager as she to get under something. Snug in bed, with the canvas over their heads, their spirits revived, and Annette told a funny old joke, and they all laughed. And then, because Annette lisped a little, like Heel-and-Toe Smith, the boys imitated her, calling her Mrs. Smith, and *dear* Mrs. Heel-and-Toe, till she was furious. The more she fought, the more they laughed and teased, finally calling her "Poor little Smithy," and she turned her back to them and whispered to Enith, who had an outside place. The boys plainly heard themselves called the "Gee and Gosh team," who thought they could boss Indians, and they racked their brains for something equally scathing.

But in the pause the long grass, made fragrant by the afternoon shower, began to talk; first softly,

then rising and sinking in a gentle, complaining croon, sounding for all the world like human voices.

"What's that!" Enith asked in a whisper, lifting the cover a bit.

"Indian spirits," Fred answered, beginning to get drowsy. "Sometimes it talks much louder, and the Indians understand everything it says."

"What's it saying now?" Enith insisted, and was answered by an owl swooping low over them, almost touching them before it melted away in the darkness, the white spots on its wings alone showing, like spook-eyes dancing in space.

The girls gasped and drew the clothes tighter over their heads. The boys laughed nervously and ducked farther under.

They were just dropping off to dreamland when the sound of a swiftly galloping horse struck their ears, and they uncovered their heads to listen. The sounds were not coming from home, but the other way.

"Indians!" Fred whispered. "We must keep very still." But he had reckoned without Maggie, who, as the steps came nearer, pricked up her ears and let out a loud whinney.

The hoofbeats paused at her call, and then turned towards them. The girls covered their mouths to keep from screaming, and Fred and Bob lay petrified watching the dim outline of the approaching rider.

Fred pulled the rifle from under the blanket, hold-

ing it ready. The man came quite close, and bending low looked on the four white faces. "Well I'll be darned!" he exclaimed.

The exclamation in their own language brought relief to the Northern Lights. The man dismounted and looked again, as though doubting his eyes, and again he exclaimed, more emphatically than before, "I will be darned! Children! What are you doing way out here!"

"We're—we're having a little camping party," Fred explained.

"Jump up and get into your clothes," he ordered. "Jerusalem, it's lucky I took this cut-off!"

They did not know what he was talking about, and indeed his words were not so surprising as was the fact that he was Liver-eating-Johnson.

"Hurry! Hurry!" he kept repeating, helping them to dress, roll up the bedding, gather their other belongings, and packing them on Maggie. "Leave the grub," he said. "I'm in a hurry and I must get you home."

He put Enith and Annette on his own horse which was still breathing hard and flecked with foam. They moved quickly homeward, Johnson asking no questions, but frequently shaking his head. The boys did not speak either. Fred was wondering how they could save this sixth chance to be used over again. He just could not bear the thought of having only a single chance left. All four wondered

what Johnson's excitement meant, and why he should be so concerned about them.

Father and Mother were just going to retire when the party arrived causing the greatest astonishment and confusion till Johnson explained that he had picked the youngsters up just in time. He was riding down the road to tell all settlers to flee to the forts, as an advance party of Sitting Bull's young men had started northward, all war-paint and recklessness. They were ready for anything that would win them a name, and would undoubtedly pass through the Prickly Pear canyon. He told it in as few words as possible and hastened towards Uncle Robert's.

Liver-eating-Johnson loved this Paul Revere ride—especially as it was against the Sioux. He was not the messenger originally sent with the warnings. The real messenger had taken a trifle too much courage out of his flask and collapsed at Brown's place. Johnson happened to be there at the time, and finding the man absolutely helpless, he elected himself to the job and did it in record time.

The Bells were in a state of bewildered excitement when Liver-eating-Johnson left them, though the letter of yesterday had caused Mother to pack into boxes the things she wanted to take to the States. She and the children finished the packing while Father harnessed the team to the wagon and opened all the corrals, chicken-houses, barns, and the pig-

sty, so the animals might be free to rustle for themselves till his return—if he should return.

In less than an hour everybody was hustled into the wagon and they were off, lickety-split, towards Uncle Robert's.

Uncle Robert's family was all ready, and after taking Fred and Annette into their own wagon, they all sped down the road. In the confusion many things had been left behind, but Mother did not forget to take her Indian collection, bows, arrows, mirrors, spears, clubs and the antelope's head. They were in everybody's way, poking the children in their backs and faces, and making Bertie cry.

Heel-and-Toe Smith refused to fly with the others. He said he and Zack would stay and look after the stock. If necessary they could hide from the Indians. They knew how. Charlie went along with the folks. The settlers all along the road had been warned by Johnson and were hastening towards the forts. The two families reached Fort Shaw as a company of soldiers were starting out to head-off the Indian war-party. Uncle Robert felt so safe at Fort Shaw that he decided to go no farther, wishing to return to his ranch as soon as the scare was over.

But Father pushed on with the others who were fleeing to Benton, the nearest point at which one could take a boat for the States. A boat was expected that very day.

Uncle Ted was happy to see the family, but refused positively to return to the East, no matter how

much Mother begged him. He tried to console her by telling her he should go to the Bell Ranch and take care of it till after the excitement, and if necessary he would hide with Zack and Smith. But secretly he was seething to fight Indians.

Charlie wept real tears of sorrow when he said good-bye to the Bell family. He enlisted right away so as to be ready for the trouble.

In the street right in front of the Benton Hotel, Enith came face to face with Teepee, and both stopped in surprise, too confused and bashful to say anything sensible till Bob joined them, and on learning it was Teepee, immediately asked "Did you get my letter?"

"No."

Enith kept looking at this Teepee, so changed that at first she thought she was mistaken. He was taller, more brown and more silent and mysterious than before. Also he was dressed with more care.

"Do you know Uncle Ted?" Bob asked Teepee.

"Yes."

"He's a Northern Light, you know. We ought to have a meeting today, don't you think so? Come on, let's find him right away."

They found Ted and he took them to a secret room where they could talk freely, giving the signs, and making Teepee realize how much was placed upon him and Fred and Ted and Annette, now that Bob and Enith would be away for some time. Of course, they were coming back, that was understood.

"Things are happening, all right," said Ted. "If we could only go to the front right away!"

"There is no front yet," said Teepee, quietly.

"No, but there will be, soon, and we've got to do our best to get near Sitting Bull."

"We are pledged to get him," said Teepee.

"Not a breath of this to other members of the family," Ted cautioned, "Mother and Aunt Lena must think I'm at the ranch, taking care of the stock. I shall seize the first chance to fight."

The meeting was interrupted by a call for Ted, and the Northern Lights separated with a warm hand-clasp. They felt very important. Bob wrote Fred about the meeting and that the oldest and smartest members were to carry the oath right to Sitting Bull's face.

Chapter 28

WORKING FOR THE SCHEME

BOB and Enith hated to go back to the States. They had learned to ride like the wind without saddle or bridle, could hang low on a pony's side while at full gallop, as Indians do to shield themselves, could swim any stream either alone or on horseback, and could crawl into any wild animal's hole too small for a man.

They could each milk five cows before their wrists played out, could make butter, and head-cheese when a pig was slaughtered. Enith could make better biscuit and cook pemmican better than Mother could. They both knew how to make tobacco from the red willow and other shrubs, could tan hides, make buckskin, braid whips. Bob could handle horses and cattle. He knew how to build fences and wickiups, to hunt small game, and repair anything on a ranch. They had a cache of wonderful things including a good supply of cones with pine-nuts, a heap of fire-sweetened gum, and a panful of obsidian and flint arrow-heads and spear-heads to use when powder gave out.

One thing partly consoled them at first, namely the wonderful trip down the river which, they thought, would be like the trip coming out, or maybe

better. But here they were greatly disappointed. Going with the current made the trip much shorter; the Captain was not jolly nor especially fond of children; he was in a hurry to reach St. Louis. The wood stations where they had stopped and found thrills, were passed by as though they did not exist. There was no Adventurer to tell stories, and, there was no Uncle Ted.

New Indian villages had sprung up all along the route, and the Indians motioned the boat to stop and trade, but it never did. It stopped only when the children were in bed, and then only to have the wood carried on as quickly and silently as possible.

The pilot was pleasant, and when Bob complained that the trip was not so much fun as the trip out, he explained that the Indians all along the river had small-pox, and that it was too dangerous to let them come on board or to go to their villages.

"Some Indians found a shallow grave and dug up the dead man for his clothes and scalp, and that started the whole thing which has been going for several years, now breaking out at one place and then at another," he said.

"I remember!" Enith excitedly exclaimed. "That man died on our boat and was buried in a grave not deep enough! I heard the men talking about it! We called the dead man the Adventurer!"

The Bells reached Chicago almost before they were ready to re-enter the civilized world, wishing for a deserted corner in which to put on dignity.

From the exit of the railway station they melted into the bustling crowd, Bob, Enith and Bertie moving as in a trance. Everything bewildered them,—the tall houses, the clatter of street busses, clanging of street-cars, all the other vehicles running around seemingly without aim or object like ants when their mound is disturbed. The wonderful display in the shop-windows made it almost impossible to drag Bertie away. Unlimited prairie and mountains had been their playgrounds so long that Bob and Enith felt as Bertie did, but they were ashamed to show it.

And in the meantime they themselves were objects of no little interest. People stared, and even turned to have another look. The whole family betrayed by their clothes, their walk, their brown faces, and interest in the most common things, that they had just come from the wilderness. Some people spoke to Bob and Enith, trying to draw them out, but they were too bashful to say much. The prices of the different articles on display seemed a joke. For four years they had seen nothing smaller than two-bits, and the shop-windows here showed tops, marbles, gum, dolls, stick-candy, fruit, and even newspapers for one cent each.

Mother was anxious to get herself and family under cover as soon as possible, but Father looked supremely happy. He was among human beings once more and did not care a rap how he looked.

Enith had her hair hanging loose over her shoulders because her mother thought it looked

better that way under a hat set far back on her head. Her skirt was very long; her basque tight, her face very brown, and she walked with the long strides of the open country, her heels catching in cracks now and then making her stumble and blush painfully.

Bob and Bertie were dressed in suits which Mother had made from Father's old clothes. Their boots were the high, copper-toed affairs, holding the trousers tucked in. Bertie was still bare-headed.

Bob and Enith refused to go outdoors or to school till they had clothes like other children.

Soon after reaching Chicago they received a letter from Uncle Robert telling them the Indian excitement was constantly growing. Bob and Enith wished themselves back there, though their wild appearance was now giving way in civilization.

All the newspapers of Chicago and other large cities had already started a lively interest in the Indian outbreak in Montana where the terrible Sitting Bull was on the war-path to clean all the white people out of his territory. There were many fights reported, some in favor of the Indians, some in favor of the whites, but the Indians were gaining. Day by day the interest grew, and everybody knew that a bloody climax was at hand.

The Government was doing what it could, sending soldiers from all directions to the front, and in this way Uncle Ted at last got his chance. Towards the last, things moved so rapidly that Ted did not

take the time to go where he could enlist, but joined a band of volunteers that was already on the march, hastening to attach itself to the army, acting independently, and doing splendid work on the way. It was nearing the scene of the biggest disaster in the history of the West, when it unexpectedly found itself completely cut off from the main body, and for several days remained in total ignorance of its movements, though it was plain that heavy fighting was going on not far away.

Charlie was one of the volunteer band. He had been refused in the army when the bullet in his wrist was discovered; so he had it cut out and carried it as a good-luck piece because he liked the volunteers better. The action of his wrist during all the years while the bullet was lodged there, had kept it brightly polished.

The secret of Bob's plan soon leaked out. It changed him and Enith to the most popular boy and girl at the school. The boys all vied with each other to become first in Bob's favor. At recess and before and after school he was the center of intensely interested groups, answering all sorts of questions and telling about the West.

And when the girls found out about it they gathered around Enith and made her, too, tell about Indians, buffaloes, snakes, and antelopes.

Before long a branch of the Northern Lights was started at Bob's home. He was made Captain, and the boys gave their most valued possessions to be-

come members of the band. They held their meetings in secret, in the loft of Bob's barn, and all were sworn to secrecy.

Bob, seated on the floor surrounded by eager listeners and the most astonishing collection of junk seen since the big fire, would have to tell over and over about the scheme, and they excitedly made plans for breaking away.

Bob wrote Fred all about his work and urged him to keep them informed of Sitting Bull's movements.

Chapter 29

TED REALIZES HIS DREAM

WESTON, under whom Ted had been on expeditions into the wilds, was captain of the volunteer band. They were in a retreat, keeping their horses and weapons in readiness night and day, knowing their time to fight again would come at any moment.

Ted was riding in advance of the others towards the protection of a rocky ridge, when suddenly a number of Indians popped up before him and immediately dropped their robes and aimed at him, one arrow grazing his right arm from elbow to wrist, paralyzing it for the time. He wheeled his horse about and fled to his companions who wanted to pursue the Indians till Weston reminded them that they would probably be led into an ambush. They withdrew into the brush and Uncle Ted's horse dropped dead. An arrow had gone clean through it.

Weston decided to stay in the shelter until night should permit a scout to reconnoitre. He himself went out and found a large body of Indians encamped in the coulee, showing signs of a recent encounter with the soldiers but getting ready for a fresh attack. So his men dug rifle-pits and lay flat, speaking not a word.

Soon a volley of arrows snarled over their heads,

and they crouched lower, making no sound. A second discharge of their arrows bringing no results, the Indians wasted no more on uncertainty and withdrew from the brush, some so near that their whisperings could be heard, and thus Weston learned that they were Sitting Bull's body guard.

Weston managed to keep his men concealed during the intense darkness, but daylight disclosed their danger. The Indians were up on the hillside, waiting for them to pass through the narrow opening between the rocks to the ridge on which their lives depended.

Weston then addressed them. "Boys," he said, "the time to fight has come. We must reach that ridge or die. Between us and the ridge lies the narrow gorge, you remember. If we are trapped in that we are lost. Someone will have to hold the Indians' attention while the rest of us slip through. It will be a dangerous job. Who will volunteer?"

A few moments of tense silence followed. Then Ted stepped forward and said, "Captain Weston, my injured hand makes me useless as a fighter at present, so I am the one to go. I'll meet the rest of you at the other end of the gorge. I know how to divert Indians."

Charlie hung his head, and everybody objected. Ted was the youngest and most inexperienced man of the party. But Ted, keeping his eyes on his Captain's face read consent before Weston could speak, and hastened to the brush at the near end of

the gorge. When he was out of sight Charlie realized his danger, and, without asking leave, ran after him shouting, "I'll stay with you, Ted! I'll stay with you!"

The Indians, seeing the two men disappear seemingly into the gorge, galloped with whoops of triumph to the side-hill above it, waiting with aiming weapons to pick them off. But they halted in amazement when the two rose out of the tall grass right in front of them, and, with yells and shots, charged the entire band.

Their bewilderment at the unheard-of daring caused a pause in the activity of the Indians, and this was precisely what Weston had counted on. He and his followers hastened safely through the gorge before the ruse was discovered. The Indians then concentrated their rage on Ted and his companion, who were fighting their way step by step with swift glances back to see how their party had progressed.

When the last man was safely through, Weston quickly drew them in battle array and turned to where Ted and Charlie were being slowly forced to the edge of the cliff. Before he could reach them they were teetering on the verge, Ted grasping the air for a hold. Then a cruel brown fist thrust itself into his face and Zanti's voice triumphantly snarled, "Your eye for mine!"

Ted tumbled head foremost down the sheer wall,

a mass of earth and rock going with him. Charlie, perforated with bullets, rolled down beside him.

Weston made a desperate advance, firing all the time, and Zanti, disguised as a full-blooded Indian, was unable to estimate Weston's forces. He believed them greater than they were, showed the white feather, and fled, taking his warriors with him.

Six men stood guard at the upper edge of the gorge while Weston and four others hastened down to Ted and Charlie. Poor Charlie was stone dead and already stripped of his clothes and scalp. Ted lay unconscious and half buried under the heavy slide of rock. They dug him out and carried him to a safer spot.

Just beyond them, to the west, General Custer's death battle was being fought. But Sitting Bull was not on the field with his warriors. He was crouching in a coulee making medicine for them to win.

The doctor of Weston's party made a careful examination of Ted's injuries and whispered to Weston. Those who heard forgot their danger and everything else till the guards called their attention to the reinforced enemy coming to overwhelm them. The rocky ridge was their single chance. To carry Ted would have immediately extinguished the feeble flame of life. To leave him while the flame flickered, was not to be thought of. And with every moment their danger was doubling.

Presently the derisive shouts of the Indians made

Ted's eyes open and he stared bewilderedly about trying to recall what had happened, and trying to read the faces of his companions. They set their teeth, ignoring all warnings till the truth of the situation flashed upon Ted and he feverishly raised himself to his elbow and looked at his useless legs. "How long, Doctor? No beating about the bush," he said, passing his hands across his eyes.

"Never mind, Ted, we'll stay with you to the end."

Ted's head dropped abruptly forward. But only for an instant. He raised it and cheerily said, "Well, boys, we all know the agreement, and I shall certainly not fail you." He reached for his revolver, but the men sprang towards him, Weston crying, "Don't, Ted! For God's sake, don't! Men hurt worse than you have recovered, and we'll stay with you no matter what happens!"

"But how long will they let you stay? Look—look ——" Ted pointed to the yelling redskins, and the moment all eyes were turned that way, the report of his revolver made his comrades' blood run cold. He died instantly, so well had he learned to use his left hand.

A hundred and fifty naked savages swooped down the hill, and all but Weston fled to the ridge followed by the Indians. Weston carried Ted to a clump of willows, and after taking his diary, letters and other personal effects, buried him in a shallow grave, covering it with brush. He crawled away,

remaining in hiding all day, and after dark reached his companions at the ridge.

"I knew Sitting Bull would get him," Mother murmured through bitter tears while reading Weston's letter. "If he only had come back with us!"

"He'd be a lot unhappier than he is now," Father replied. "He had a taste of the life he craved, and he was not afraid to die."

So Sitting Bull got Ted. But the Northern Lights had one chance left.

It took a long time for letters from Fred to reach Chicago. One was received from him while the band was in a ferment of eagerness to avenge Uncle Ted's death. They hung on every word as Bob read it aloud.

After discussing the terrible battle, as they saw it out West, Fred urged Bob to lose no time in gathering the bravest boys in Chicago and bringing them out at once. They had a sacred duty now, and the main object of their lives must be revenge!

Besides boys, Bob should bring guns, pistols, knives, ammunition, and spurs. Fred himself already had a new Henry rifle, a tent, horse, colt, and two Bowie knives. This letter caused a great deal of excitement, especially as it ended with: "If you can't come right away you'll have to follow these orders to the last letter. Call every member to a secret meeting-place, arm yourselves well, and then kneel in a circle on the ground. Take each other's hands, turn your faces upward, close your eyes and

say in unison, 'Great Spirits of the red men who are friendly to the white men, we invoke your aid to invest the power of the Northern Lights' *seventh chance* in Teepee, sworn enemy of Sitting Bull, wherever he may be.' Say it three times in succession, on the third of next month, at three minutes to three. Annette and I will do the same at the same time so the charm will work."

The words "invoke" and "invest" rather awed the band, but Bob had looked them up in the dictionary and seemed quite familiar with them. He went on in a businesslike way to call their attention to the fact that it was already the first of the month, and preparations must be started at once.

He asked if every member was willing to invest Teepee with the power, and a lively discussion arose, as some feared to lose the seventh chance which would spoil all the fun of running away and living wild.

"No matter how soon we go," said Bob, "we can't reach Montana before the third! And we have to obey the orders of our Captain, don't we?"

But the dissenters held out against the orders, and the band came near breaking up. They quarreled over the things they had given and Bob finally adjusted matters by explaining that Teepee might be dead for all they knew, and the power would stay theirs so long as it was not actually used, and so everybody was pacified.

In the afternoon of the third of the month the

band stole out to the sand hills, far from possible observers, and kneeling in a circle with a watch before them, clasped hands, and at three minutes to three turned their faces upward, closed their eyes, and at Bob's signal, solemnly repeated the invocation to the great spirits three times.

"Yep, Teepee may be dead for all we know," Bob repeated after the prayer. "He was always scouting, doing Indian running, trying to enlist, and taking big chances of danger to get near Sitting Bull. Of course he's too young to enlist, but he can do a lot of other things 'cause he is awful smart. But you know our prayer don't mean that we should stop all our preparing. If our Captain's next letter calls us, we've got to strike right out, no matter whether we're ready or not."

He followed this speech with hurry-up orders, and the excitement was greater than ever.



Chapter 30

THE SEVENTH CHANCE

THE Custer battle made Sitting Bull famous. Because the death of such a prominent and popular man as Custer was the very peak of Sitting Bull's triumph, he did not betray the fact that General Custer committed suicide when faced by the horror of his rash act. Nor did he tell that, to strengthen his medicine, he had visited the body of Custer on the battle-field, and talked to it almost half an hour. And just as Custer's ghost was leaving the body, it told him, Sitting Bull, exactly when he would die, and that he would be tricked to death by soldiers.

Sitting Bull was afraid of death. He was afraid of the prophecy of the exalted Custer, and in self-defense he told the ghost that he never meant to wipe out the white man, but only to wipe out his rule over the Indians. However, his conversation with Custer was his own secret.

Because his medicine had achieved this tremendous victory over the white man, Sitting Bull's people looked upon him as a super-being who might accomplish anything. While the excitement was still high, they wanted him to make a medicine so strong that it would kill off all the rest of the white people in the territory.

He evaded the question, putting his hot-headed warriors off time and again till they resented his attitude, and the more impatient ones deserted him and took matters into their own hands. They committed such horrible crimes that the Government decided on prompt action and sent peremptory orders for all Sioux Indians to come to the Agency and settle down by the end of January. If they did not, they would be looked upon as enemies of the United States and treated accordingly.

These orders Sitting Bull received with sneers and defiance. He was exceedingly eager to regain his former greatness in the eyes of his cooling people, and thought this his opportunity. So he secretly revived the Ghost Dances, which had been strictly forbidden because they excited the Indians to all kinds of violence, making them drunk with fanatical inspirations.

Sitting Bull also laughed at the orders forbidding the dances, and worked at them harder than ever. The warnings and threats from the Government made him all the more daring and determined.

He spat upon written communications from the Agency, and his warriors were satisfied.

Finally three columns of soldiers were placed at different points of the Sioux country and ordered to march quickly to a common center and sweep all the Sioux before them, crushing those who resisted.

Meanwhile the Ghost Dances waxed and waxed, like some contagious disease breaking out all over the West at the same time, predicting a war far more bloody than anything that had gone before. Again the white settlers fled to the forts, or went East while there was a chance.

The Ghost-dance foretold the coming of the great Indian Leader, which meant that the Indian would rule again and forever on his own territory.

This time Uncle Robert did not flee from home. He sent Aunt Lena and the children to Helena, and himself stayed at the ranch, building a fortification around the buildings in which his nearest neighbors took refuge when the danger seemed greatest.

Sitting Bull worked night and day, using all the cunning of his supposed magic. He had a mysteriously woven ghost-shirt which was supposed to make its wearer invisible to the enemy, and was bullet-proof beside. His warriors had absolute faith in it, and the deserters came back to him, ready to do anything he ordered.

The dance-ground was an extremely busy scene. In the center of it stood a tall pole with all kinds of flags floating from it; and close to it was Sitting

Bull's own teepee where he sat in state and prepared the dancers for the big battle. His hands and wrists were painted green and yellow, and his face green, red, and white. Those who took part in the dance he decorated with blue crescents on their foreheads, chins, and cheeks; and a cross on their noses between the eyes.

When painted they joined the dance around the center pole, chanting religious songs and keeping their eyes firmly fixed on the sun.

The squaws also danced, and many little children went to the chief to be painted and formed dances of their own.

When Sitting Bull went so far as to have some recently killed white men dug up and gave their scalps to his most fanatical bucks to carry in the dance, a perfect frenzy resulted, and the crisis was at hand.

The Government knew that something decisive would have to be done immediately, and ordered a company of Negro soldiers—of whom Indians usually were afraid—and a squad of Indian police, to rush to the scene to arrest Sitting Bull and bring him to the Agency. This was not easy. The soldiers found themselves hopelessly outnumbered by Indians who were at a tension of reckless hostility.

The situation demanded careful and cool-headed handling, and after a thorough discussion of it one of the Indian police volunteered to go alone into the

Indian camp and inform Sitting Bull that he was under arrest and would have to come to the Agency at once. The messenger was a youthful fellow, of slight build, keen of eye and quick of action. He had served here and there as scout and spy. No one knew his name or gave him especial attention, but everybody liked to feel that he was around.

On receiving permission he went unhesitatingly into the seething Indian camp and delivered the message to Sitting Bull. The chief flew into a great rage, snapping his fingers in the messenger's face and insolently refusing to obey.

"Very well, Chief," the messenger quietly said, "I was chosen to get you—and I'm going to."

He slipped quickly through the Indian lines, and half an hour later the Indians and soldiers stood in battle array, ready to fly at each other's scalps, the warriors hardly able to restrain themselves while awaiting Sitting Bull's signal. It looked as though it were all up with the soldiers.

And at that precise moment Sitting Bull's instinct of self-preservation whispered to him. He wanted to disappear. He wanted to disappear without help so it might seem that his magic shirt was making him invisible. While his warriors were restlessly waiting, he stole to the rear of his lodge, crawled out of a secret door made for the purpose, and walked squarely into the most cleverly arranged trap he had faced in his long career. He was surrounded by silent soldiers.

Instantly he realized his danger and began to call loudly for help. Four Negro soldiers hustled him on to a horse and started for the Agency, hoping to get beyond the reach of bullets before the Indians realized what was happening behind the lodge. But Sitting Bull made a terrible noise, blustering, chattering, slipping to the ground and trying to run while angrily shouting orders for a rescue. The entire Indian band was now aware of the situation and hastened to the spot. A shock of hopelessness momentarily lamed the soldiers and they got ready to face the end. Despite their boiling blood the Indians did not dare fire without their chief's permission, and he was lifting his hand to give the signal which would have drenched the entire West in blood, when a mysterious bullet whined sharply through the intensely silent moment, causing him to straighten up abruptly, turn his face to the sky, and then drop heavily to earth.

A while the warriors stood paralyzed, staring aghast at their fallen chief, refusing to believe what they saw. Then they covered their faces and fled. The invincible bullet-proof shirt, their mighty leader, and all their hopes for the coming of the Great Leader, were brought to earth by a single bullet which came from no one knew where. They refused to touch the dead chief's body, and the Ghost Dances died at that moment.

During the confusion of their flight Sitting Bull's body disappeared and was quickly and secretly

nailed up in a dry-goods box and put into the earth with the marks of burial obliterated.

Souvenir collecting tourists who chip a piece from the wooden slab that supposedly marks Sitting Bull's resting place, do not know that the constantly dwindling slab has been replaced many times by a fresh one which may or may not be anywhere near the real grave.

Nowadays the Indians rarely speak of Sitting Bull to white people, but some of them often see him and General Custer sitting at the same camp-fire in a mystic wood, chatting pleasantly about by-gone days. No Indian can be found who will chop down a single tree in that forest.

While the name of Sitting Bull's destroyer will never be known to the public, the Northern Lights know it. The sender of that fatal bullet immediately sent a knot of rope to his Captain, Fred, and Fred formally informed all the other members. They will keep the secret forever.

THE END

Note: The interval to Sitting Bull's death has been intentionally shortened.

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